# THE MODERN SCHOOLMAN

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YVES R. SIMON and J. L. PEGHAIRE, C. S. SP.

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BOOK REVIEW: LE THOMISME
By Etienne Gilson
GERARD SMITH, S.J.

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Vol. XXIII MARCH, 1946 No. 3

THE MODERN SCHOOLMAN

A Quarterly Journal of Philosophy

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF SENSATION

## I. EDITOR'S NOTE: THE PROBLEM OF SENSATION

THOMISTIC PHILOSOPHY has always "paid honor"—to use Maritain's phrase—both to sense knowledge and to the material world.

Thomism, in common with Platonism, maintains the essential difference between sense and intellect; but it also insists, as against every philosophy of Platonic inspiration, on the intelligibility of material things and on the dependence of human intellect, precisely as *human* intellect, upon sense data. Problems of sensation and sense knowledge are therefore of capital importance in Thomistic philosophy; indeed they involve crucial issues for any Christian and realistic philosophy.[1] Yet, apparently Neo-Thomism has devoted to these problems neither the extensive research nor the speculative energy that it has given, for example, to the theory of analogy and to the study of intellectual operations. The elaboration of a precise and purified theory of sensation appears to be one of the great tasks facing Thomists today. This elaboration is necessary not only for the proper health and intrinsic development of Thomism itself but for the Thomistic critique of modern philosophy and science. Maritain writes:

> The true philosophy of nature pays honour to the mystery of sense perception, and is aware that it only takes place because the boundless cosmos is activated by the First Cause whose motion traverses all physical activities so as to make them produce, at the extreme border where matter awakens to *esse spirituale*, an effect of knowledge on an animated organ.

[1] Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: Scribner's, 1936), pp. 229-47.

> . . . It is instructive here to observe that the rebirth of the philosophy of nature in Germany in our time due to the phenomenological movement, goes, in the case of Mme. Hedwig Conrad-Martius, for instance, and of Plessner and Friedmann, along with a vast effort to rehabilitate sense knowledge. . . . In my eyes [the] existence [of this effort] bears witness to a fundamental and intrinsic need of natural philosophy, which is too frequently neglected by modern scholastics.[2]

These considerations led THE MODERN SCHOOLMAN to canvass the opinions of a number of leading American Scholastic philosophers on this point. Their replies indicated a substantial agreement that this problem has been, in general, neglected and treated, sometimes, in a cavalier fashion. THE MODERN SCHOOLMAN, thereupon, with the hope of encouraging constructive discussion and research, requested Professor Yves Simon to prepare an outline of the problems involved and of the order in which they should be studied. We here present Professor Simon's paper together with comments by Father Péghaire. Further discussion by our readers is invited.

[The papers are divided into numbered paragraphs to facilitate reference; the numbering of the two papers does not correspond.]

## II. ON THE PROBLEM OF SENSATION: OUTLINE OF A PROGRAM OF RESEARCH

When the philosopher starts investigating the problem of sensation, he is not supposed to know, as yet, anything about psychical life. The place of the Aristotelian treatise on sensation is significant: it begins with Chapter V of the second book of the *De anima*. Now, the first book of the *De anima* is devoted to an exposition and a discussion of theories concerning the soul held by previous philosophers; the first four chapters of the second book deal with vegetative life; the treatises which are placed before the *De anima* in the received classification of the Aristotelian writings deal with the common properties of physical things and with problems pertaining to the inanimate world. Thus, the chapters on sensation constitute the very first part of the treatment of psychical life. In good Aristotelian method, the philosopher who is becoming acquainted with sensation is achieving his first acquaintance with the universe of knowledge. The procedure followed by the many writers who start their books of psychology with considerations on consciousness, and present sensation as a particular "consciousness-phenomenon" is thoroughly un-Aristotelian. It is a typically Cartesian procedure.

Accordingly, our first notions concerning sensation will not be acquired by locating sensation in any such genus as "psychical processes" or "consciousness-phenomena," but by describing a set of

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[2] Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1940), pp. 59-60.

*contrasts* between the characteristics of sensation and those of the physical processes which have been analysed in the preceding parts of the philosophy of nature.

1. Following the example of Aristotle, we should first consider the difference between sensation and physical processes from the point of view of *passivity*. A physical passion is a complex event, which implies a loss as a necessary condition for an acquisition; thus a piece of wax cannot receive a new shape without suffering the loss of the shape which it previously possessed. This is what St. Thomas calls a *passio proprie dicta;* here, the patient undergoes a law that is not its own, but that of the agent: it would be quite fitting to designate such a passion as *heteronomic passion*. On the other hand, while it is obvious that the sense undergoes the influence of its object, it is no less obvious that such an influence does not necessarily and intrinsically imply any loss or destruction, but constitutes an actuation of the potency of the sense. The sense receives its own perfection from the object, which acts as a friendly principle. This is what St. Thomas calls a *passio improprie dicta;* let us say, an *autonomic passion*.

2. By saying that sensation is a passion of a certain kind, we do not mean that it is a merely passive process. Considering sensation from the point of view of activity, we find in it the first example of *immanent action*. We shall put a strong emphasis on the contrast between immanent action and the common type of action analysed by Aristotle in the third book of the Physics. We shall not fail to point out, on the other hand, that the concept of immanent action is but imperfectly realized in sensation, inasmuch as the immanent action of sensing necessarily coincides with a transitive action exercised by a physically present object.

3. Considering sensation, in the third place, from the point of view of *unity*, we shall describe it as an *intentional union*. Here is the crucial point: whereas the union of a matter and a form—let us say a *matter-form union*—gives birth to a third reality made of the two united terms, the union that takes place between the sense and its object does not give birth to any composite; sense and object remain face to face in their union, without altering each other.

And thus we have firmly established the main characteristics of sensation as a psychical event. We know, at least basically, what we have to account for. Many deceptive theories are already ruled out, inasmuch as they treat sensation as if it were a heteronomic passion, a transitive action, a matter-form union.

4. Next comes the question: *How* can the physically present object bring about, in the sensorial power, this autonomic passion, this immanent action, this intentional union? The theory of the *species sensibilis* (let us say, *sensorial idea*) is a way toward an answer.

This theory is best introduced by a comparion between the Epicurean simulacrum and the Aristotelian species. The simulacrum is a small thing which enters inconspicuously into the body and carries to the soul a picture of the big external thing; it is a small thing that resembles a big thing and that, on account of its minuteness, does things that a big thing cannot afford to do. On the other hand, the Aristotelian species *is not a thing.* This is what Cajetan shows in a celebrated commentary: ". . . duo sunt genera entium. Quaedam ad hoc primo instituta ut sint, quamvis forte secundario alia repraesentent: et haec vocamus *res.* Quaedam vero ad hoc primo instituta sunt naturaliter, ut alia repraesentent: et haec vocamus *intentiones rerum,* et *species* sensibiles seu intelligibiles."[3] From a metaphysical point of view, Cajetan thus defines the species by the following proportion:

$$\frac{\text{species}}{\text{the act of representing an object}} = \frac{\text{thing}}{\text{the act of existing}}$$

It should be possible to express similar relations on the level of philosophical physics, of which psychology is a part. Considering, on the one hand, that the most intimate union that can result from the putting together of two things is a matter-form union; considering, on the other hand, that the union that the sensorial idea is intended to account for is an intentional union, we can describe the sensorial idea as an entity that is to an intentional union what a thing is to a matter-form union. The proportion:

$$\frac{\text{sensorial idea}}{\text{sensation as an intentional union}} = \frac{\text{physical thing}}{\text{matter-form union}}$$

constitutes a definition of the sensorial idea that, though obviously obscure, is entirely safe.

5. Here it becomes necessary to compare sensorial knowledge with higher forms of knowledge, as Aristotle often does. This does not imply that, contrary to our initial propositions, higher forms of knowledge should be studied before sensation; it only implies that the theory of sensation cannot be completed without some acquaintance with higher cognitive processes, which acquaintance will be primarily derived from common experience and common thinking.

[3] Cajetan, *In I Summae Theologicae,* 55. 3.

There are ideas in the intellect: let us call them concepts; in the imagination—we call them images; in the memory—we call them memories. These ideas are known to us in and through an experience. On the contrary, sensorial ideas, if there are any such entities, seem to escape the grasp of any experience. Their existence, if it is to be established at all, has to be established by a rational analysis. It can be said that *one major distinguishing feature of Aristotelian psychology is the proposition that there are species, ideas, not only in the intellect and in the internal senses, but also in the external senses.*

The causation of the sensorial idea raises a problem of the first magnitude. Other ideas (those of the intellect, of the imagination, of memory) are born within the soul; they result, in some way or other, from previous acts of knowledge; in last analysis, from sensations. The sensorial idea is not born inside the soul. It is born in the physical nature, produced in the sense by the action of the sensible object. *One major distinguishing feature of Aristotelian psychology is the proposition that the gap between nature and the soul is bridged by ideas of an absolutely initial character, which originate in the physical nature, which exist as qualities in the physical nature before they come to exist as ideas in the soul.*

6. The problem is now to find an adequate cause, inside the physical nature, for that entity which is not a thing, but an idea, the *species sensibilis.*

This tremendously important question has been given little treatment. In most of his writings on sensation, St. Thomas abstracts from the question whether the object, which causes the species, causes it by the power that it owes to its proper nature or by some participated power. Yet in a passage of the *De Potentia*[4] he explicitly traces the production of the sensorial idea to a participation of physical things in a way of acting that is proper to separate substances. Cajetan discusses the question rather thoroughly in his commentary on the *De anima.*[5] Here is his conclusion: "si ad proximum agens respiciendum est, forma objecti est. Si ad primarium cujus participatione hoc fit, separatum est agens."

7. In close connection with the last problem, we have to investigate the question of the existence of the sensorial idea *in the medium.* Cajetan teaches that forms are spiritualized gradually and that between their material condition in the object and their psychical condition in the sense they enjoy, in the medium, a condition that is intentional and non-psychical. Notice that the concept of such a condition would solve the problem of the termination of the act of

[4] 5. 8c.

[5] *In II de anima,* 11. Along the same line, see John of St. Thomas, *Philosophia Naturalis,* III, 6. 3.

sensorial knowledge: no *species expressa* is needed in external senses because the form *in the medium* is a term whose degree of immateriality is proportionate to the degree of immateriality of sense knowledge. On this, see Cajetan, *In II de anima*, 6.

8. Here comes the question of sensation as an essentially *experimental* knowledge. In an admirable dissertation, John of St. Thomas shows that a sensation without a physically present object implies a contradiction.[6]

9. Concerning the *validity* of sense knowledge, the first thing to do is to expound the Aristotelian division of the sensible objects into *per se proper, per se common,* and *per accidens* sensible objects. With regard to *per accidens* objects of sensation, the sense does not enjoy any natural guarantee of validity; no natural guarantee of validity, either, with regard to common sensible objects. With regard to proper sensible objects, the sense enjoys an essential indefectibility, compatible, however, with incidental failures. Those considerations suffice to destroy the grounds of most objections against the reliability of sense knowledge, since such objections are generally relative to the perception of *per accidens* sensible objects, or to that of common sensible objects, or to incidental failures in the knowledge of proper sensible objects. Yet serious difficulties concern the normal perception of the very proper object of each sensorial power. In order to clear them up we shall ponder over the mutability of sense qualities and analyse its consequences with regard to the *kind of truth* that can be expected of powers of knowledge whose object is thoroughly mutable. The temptation is great to attribute to the object of sense knowledge a steadiness which is a property of intelligible objects.

10. Concerning the *division* of the external senses, it should apparently be granted that it is not any more possible for philosophy to define any particular sense than to define any particular chemical or living species in its ultimate specificity.

However, philosophy can go beyond the generic study of *the* external sense. The distinction made by Gredt between higher senses and lower senses seems philosophically relevant and can be greatly clarified by using the concepts of proprio-ceptive and extero-ceptive sensations. Lower senses (e.g., touch) are those whose operations are either proprio-ceptive sensations or combinations of proprio-ceptive and extero-ceptive sensations. Higher senses (e.g., sight) are those whose operations are pure extero-ceptive sensations.

11. The question of *affective sensations* (pleasure and pain) should be treated in connection with proprio-ceptive sensations.

12. Next comes the question of the *consciousness* of sensation. See Cajetan, *In II de anima*, 13.

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[6] *Philosophia Naturalis*, III, 6. 1.

13. The theory of sensation normally ends with the problem of the organization of *concrete perception*. It would be particularly relevant to show how the knowledge of the common sensible objects and of the *per accidens* sensible objects acquires some kind of steadiness, despite the fact that the sense lacks any natural guarantee with regard to any object that is not its proper object.

YVES R. SIMON

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## III. NOTE ON THE CONSIDERATION GIVEN BY SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHERS TO EXTERNAL SENSATION

1. Professor Yves Simon is quite correct in deploring the altogether incomplete treatment accorded to the problem of external sensation by Scholastic philosophers. I quite agree with him that this problem is in great need of being defined and examined more deeply.

2. I am of the opinion that it is all-important to make a clear distinction between the two points of view, the psychological and the critical. Each of these calls for a separate consideration, yet with equal emphasis, though the psychological consideration must obviously be made the foundation of the study of the value of the truth that comes from sensation. The psychological part of the study should bring out clearly the possible contribution of experimental psychology as well as the pertinent facts and problems from rational psychology.

3. First of all, there should be an attempt to determine clearly and precisely just to what extent the data furnished by St. Thomas, Suarez, and John of St. Thomas (and the other early Scholastic philosophers as well) can be accepted in our own day. This would call for a *historical* study marking the difference in these theories between elements founded on an outdated and therefore false physiology, and conclusions resulting from a very elementary experience, which might even today have a certain validity. This study would follow to some extent the general lines of what I suggested in my article on the internal senses, "A Forgotten Sense, the Cogitative."[7] Of course, the projected study would have to go far deeper than I attempted to do in my article.

4. Taking as a starting-point the data of contemporary psychology as it differentiates between *a*) stimulus and response, *b*) the impression made on the nervous system, and *c*) the psychic reaction which is sensation in the proper sense, an act of cognition, there would have to be an inquiry into the extent to which this analysis prepares the way for the Thomistic analysis, which, as I see it, is concerned exclusively with the third stage, the question on which contemporary

[7] *The Modern Schoolman*, XX (May, 1943), pp. 210-29.

psychologists seem to have reached the very maximum of confusion. Here is precisely the place for the solution of the question of *impressed sensible species,* and the examination of Numbers 5 and 6 of Professor Simon's notes.

5. There would be no reason for giving too much importance to the study of the "medium," contrary to Professor Simon's suggestion. If I understand it correctly, this "medium" is really nothing other than air, or "the ether," or perhaps also the nerve substances of the sense nerves and the cerebral centers at which they terminate. There is here no question of a psychic "entity," but of a physical, or at best a physiological, factor having nothing to do with impressed species.

6. Rather would I suggest that close attention be given to the question of whether or not there are expressed sensible species. Here the whole question of sensible intuition is at stake, and, connected with this, the question of the validity of both our internal and external senses.

7. I am not as pessimistic as Professor Simon on the question of the specific determination of the different external senses. Even should the difficulty be as great as he thinks it is, it would still be far from useless to institute once and for all a historical study of the views of the ancients on this question and to make a serious critical evaluation of the reasons they give as a foundation for their distinction. To my knowledge this work has never been undertaken. The little attention I personally have given to the subject has served to convince me that many most interesting points could be discovered, especially in the writings of Albert the Great and Alexander of Hales, and perhaps even in those of Scotus and Suarez. Likewise, it would still be far from useless to discover and bring out the principle or principles which the early Scholastics apply in working out this question.

It would then be possible to attempt at least a definition of the distinction in question and an examination, from the Thomistic point of view, of all the supposedly modern senses (kinaesthetic, coenesthetic, sense of equilibrium, and so on).

8. Like Professor Simon I am quite convinced of the great importance of throwing light, from the Thomistic point of view, on the question of what is nowadays called "perception" or the construction of a sensible object. (Cf. W. James, *The Principles of Psychology,* II, chaps. xix, xx, xxi.) Some modern Scholastic writers, such as Gredt, admit this conception; but to what extent can the conception itself be found in St. Thomas's doctrine or reduced to his principles?

9. This last question brings us to the very threshhold of the critical question of external sensation. Thorough examination of this last problem is absolutely necessary. Contemporary Scholastics, as well as philosophers of post-Cartesian development, introduce much

confusion into this question, thus jeopardizing the possibility of an adequate and satisfying answer to the problem of the validity of all of human cognition. But the problem seems to me far more complicated than Professor Simon seems to think it is in number 11 of his outline. In my opinion, the following would be required: (1) a serious historical study of the position of St. Thomas and the other great medieval philosophers, with a careful working out of the relation which these authors establish between the validity they grant to the senses and their theories in the fields of physiology, physics, and (where one can speak of such) optics and acoustics; (2) a study of the position held by contemporary philosophers on the notion of sensation, in which they hopelessly mix up the ideas of *sensatum* and *sensatio*—and this bit of research would no doubt involve a pushing of the inquiry all the way to Kant and Descartes, thus showing how, historically speaking, these modern views date their beginnings from the decadence of Scholasticism; and (3) a constructive essay, made possible by the previous work of clearing away, which would give special attention to reality and which, I am sure, would have as its result a sort of illustration of St. Thomas's principles, thought out again, now, in the setting furnished by contemporary physiology and experimental psychology.

10. This would lead to a careful search for the relations existing between sensible cognition and intellectual cognition, from the purely psychological point of view as well as from the critical point of view. For there is no doubt that man never performs an act of sensation unaccompanied by some more or less complex act of spiritual intellection. It would be most useful to have definite ideas on this problem. To my knowledge, this research has never been undertaken.

11. Modern philosophers devote a great deal of attention to cognition of duration and time, of space, of movement. It would be well for us to have, as part of our Scholastic philosophy, a psychological as well as a critical study of this question. We should therefore see whether there can be found in St. Thomas's writings the elements of a solution to this problem, or at least basic principles which might serve in solving it in the spirit of the Angelic Doctor, without at the same time neglecting the data contributed by modern philosophy.

12. I shall close by calling attention to two points. *a*) Research similar to that outlined above would be a worth-while thing—to be done at a later date—on the subject of the internal senses. Indeed, will it be possible to carry out the research on the external senses without some reference at least to the *sensus communis?* *b*) Will not the answers given to this group of questions by different authors be lacking in unity?

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# ABSTRACTION FROM MATTER IN HUMAN COGNITION ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS

HUMAN COGNITION is a cognition that is caused by things. Thus a certain change or alteration takes place in the being that knows. There is a process or *fieri* that precedes and makes possible the act of cognition. St. Thomas analyzes this process, as he does all change, along the lines of act and potency. He establishes certain parallels between the changes that take place in the physical order and those that take place in the intentional or cognitive order. Many of his most fundamental metaphysical principles of change are applied to the cognitive process. In point of fact, it is by a close analysis of what takes place in physical becoming that St. Thomas is able to explain many of the processes that lead up to the act of human cognition.

It is by this study of the act of human cognition as a process resembling physical change that St. Thomas concludes that for all human cognition, no matter how crude or elementary, some abstraction from matter is needed. For even in the changes that occur outside the order of cognition there takes place, in a certain sense, some "abstraction" from matter.

There is an important text in which St. Thomas analyzes the act of cognition along the lines of a process or *fieri*. Here he shows that some abstraction from matter is necessary for all human cognition; and he explains the difference between the kind of abstraction from matter necessary for cognition and a certain kind of "abstraction" from matter that is present in all merely physical changes. Commenting on the words of Aristotle "It is universal and common to all the senses that they are receptive of forms without matter"[1] St. Thomas puts the objection that to receive a form without matter, and thus in some way abstracted from matter, seems to be true of all things that undergo change, whether they be cognoscitive beings or not.[2] The first argument, he states, is a priori and taken from reason. Every patient receives something from an agent precisely in so far as the latter is an agent; but an agent is in act, that is, is constituted

[1] The reference in Aristotle is *De anima*, ii. 12. 420a. 17-19.

[2] "Dicit ergo primo quod hoc oportet accipere, universaliter et communiter omni sensui inesse, quod sensus est susceptivus specierum sine materia, sicut cera recipit signum anuli sine ferro et auro. Sed hoc videtur esse commune omni patienti." *In II de An.*, lect. 24.

an agent, through its form, which is the principle of action,[3] and not through its matter.[4]

St. Thomas's second reason for objecting to Aristotle's phrase is taken, he tells us, a posteriori and from experience. We see, for example, that when fire heats air, the air receives the form (heat) by which the fire is constituted in act (*agens in actu secundo*), but the air does not receive the matter of the fire;[5] else the air would not be "heated air" but "heated fire."

St. Thomas answers these objections by making a distinction. It is common to all recipients to receive a form from the agent, and indeed to receive that form without the same numerical matter[6] that it has in the agent. But all recipients do not receive this form *in the same way;* for some receive the form according to the same manner

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[3] "Quaelibet actio sequitur conditionem formae agentis, quae est principium actionis." *De Ver.,* 2. 6c.

[4] "Omne enim patiens recipit aliquid ab agente secundum quod est agens. Agens autem agit per suam formam, et non per suam materiam; omne enim patiens recipit formam sine materia." *In II de An.,* lect. 24. This is not to say that the form is that *which* acts but rather that *by which the* composite acts. "Agere non est nisi rei per se subsistentis; et ideo neque materia agit neque forma, sed compositum; quod tamen non agit ratione materiae, sed ratione formae, quae es actus, et actionis principium." *In IV Sent.,* d. 12, 1. 2 sol. 1. Cf. also *De Pot.,* 3. 4c.

[5] "Et hoc etiam ad sensum apparet; non enim aer recipit ab igne agente, materiam ejus, sed formam; non igitur videtur hoc proprium esse sensus, quod sit receptivus specierum sine materia." *Ibid.*

[6] This, of course, is true of the form also; what the agent induces in the patient is not the former's same numerical form—to say this would be a contradiction—but only the likeness of that form. Forms are numerically different because they inhere in numerically different matters. "Respondeo dicendum, quod anima humana similitudines rerum quibus cognoscit, accipit a rebus illo modo accipiendi quo patiens accipit ab agente; quod non est intelligendum quasi agens influat in patiens eamdem numero speciem quam habet in se ipso, sed generat sui similem educendo de potentia in actum." *Quodlibet. VIII, 2.* 3c. The cognoscitive species or form that is received in the cognoscitive potency—another form—is individuated by this potency. "Ad tertium dicendum, quod secundum Avicennam . . . species intellecta potest dupliciter considerari: aut secundum esse quod habet in intellectu, et sic habet esse singulare; aut secundum quod est similitudo talis rei intellectae, prout ducit in cognitionem ejus; et ex hac parte habet universalitatem; quia non est, sed secundum naturam in qua cum aliis suae speciei convenit. Nec oportet omne singulare esse intelligible tantum in potentia (sicut patet de substantiis separatis), sed in illis quae individuantur per materiam, sicut sunt corporalia; sed species istae individuantur per individuationem intellectus; unde non perdunt esse intelligible in actu; sicut intelligo me intelligere, quamvis ipsum meum intelligere sit quaedam operatio singularis. Patet etiam per se, quod secundum inconveniens non sequitur; quia alius individuationis modus est per intellectum et per materiam primam." *In II Sent.,* d. 17, 2. 1 ad 3. Finally, it should be pointed out here that the cognoscitive species which is educed from the sense or intellectual faculty leads to the knowledge of the thing as a whole and not merely to the knowledge of the form of the thing. Thus the species is properly called a *forma totius,* whereas the substantial form in the thing known is a *forma partis;* the latter is only part of the physical essence of the thing. The cognoscitive species can be a *forma totius* because in Thomistic metaphysics it is always the composite—a *totum* that acts, and not merely the form, although the composite acts by reason of the form.

of being that it had in the agent. Other recipients receive the form according to a *manner of being* different from that which it had in the agent. St. Thomas gives the reason for this difference. If the recipient possesses the same *material* disposition for the form that it receives from the agent as the agent itself has for this form, then the recipient will receive it according to the same manner of being that it had in the agent; that is, the patient will receive the form according to a material manner of being. This kind of material reception is called "natural reception" and is had in the case of non-cognoscitive beings.[7]

In some patients, however, the material dispositions for a certain form that is about to be received will not be the same as the material dispositions for this form that exists in the agent giving the form. In such a case the form will be assimilated by the patient according to a manner of being different from that which, owing to the material conditions of the agent, it had in the agent. In the matter of the agent the form exists materially, whereas in the patient it will exist intentionally or spiritually.[8] The union the agent had with the form was a material union, a union of matter and form, whereas the union that the patient has with the form is a formal union, a union of form with form;[9] for the latter has received the form according to its own

[7] "Dicendum igitur, quod licet hoc sit omni patienti, quod recipiat formam ab agente, differentia tamen est in modo recipiendi. Nam forma, quae in patiente recipitur ab agente, quandoque quidem habet eumdem modum essendi in patiente, quem habet in agente; et hoc quidem contingit, quando patiens habet eamdem dispositionem ad formam, quam habet agens. Unde si eodem modo disponatur patiens sicut agens, eodem modo recipitur forma in patiente sicut erat in agente; et tunc non recipitur forma sine materia. Licet enim illa et eadem materia numero quae est agentis, non fiat patientis, fit tamen quodammodo eadem, inquantum similem dispositionem materialem ad formam acquirit ei quae erat in agente. Et hoc modo aer patitur ab igne, et quidquid patitur passione naturali." *In II de An.*, lect. 24.

[8] "Quandoque vero forma recipitur in patiente secundum alium modum essendi quam sit in agente; quia dispositio materialis patientis ad recipiendum, non est similis dispositioni materiali quae est in agente. Et ideo forma recipitur in patienti sine materia, inquantum patiens assimilatur agenti secundum formam, et non secundum materiam. Et per hunc modum, sensus recipit formam sine materia, quia alterius modi esse habet forma in sensu, et in re sensibili. Nam in re sensibili habet esse naturale, in sensu autem habet esse intentionale et spirituale." *Ibid.*

[9] "Secundum autem quod intelligit res alias, intellectum in actu fit unum cum intellectu in actu, inquantum forma intellecti fit forma intellectus, inquantum est intellectus in actu, non quod sit ipsamet essentia intellectus, ut Avicenna probat in 6 *de Naturalibus;* quia essentia intellectus manet una sub duabus formis, secundum quod intelligit res duas successive, ad modum quo materia prima manet una sub diversis formis; unde etiam Commentator in 3 *de Anima*, comparat intellectum possibilem quantum ad hoc materiae primae." *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, 2. 1 ad 10. To distinguish the difference between the manner in which prime matter receives a form and the way a form is received into a cognoscitive power, St. Thomas does not use the terms "subjective" and "objective" reception. This is the terminology of his later commentators. He does, however, use the words *materialiter* and *formaliter* to distinguish this difference. "Secundum hoc cognitio perficitur, quod cognitum est in cogno-

and not the agent's mode of being.[10]

This difference between the reception of a form according to the same material conditions and hence according to the same manner of being as the form possesses in the agent, and the reception of a form according to a manner of being higher and different from that which it has in the agent, is what distinguishes a union that results in cognition from one that does not; the one union is intentional, the other *merely* physical.[11] Yet in each case there has been a certain "abstraction" from matter, for in each it is the form rather than the matter that has been assimilated.[12] But in the instance of non-cognoscitive beings the assimilation of the form has been material, for the form has been received in matter; in the case of the cognoscitive being the assimilation of the form has been immaterial, for it has been received in another form, in a power or faculty having some independence from matter.[13]

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scente, non quidem materialiter sed formaliter. . . . Habere aliquid in se formaliter et non materialiter, in quo consistit ratio cognitionis, est nobilissimus modus habendi, vel continendi aliquod. . . . Unde etiam non omnia viventia pertinguut ad gradum cognitionis; sed solum illa in quibus principium motionis est aliquid formale absque materia. Nam et ipse sensus est susceptivus specierum sensibilium sine materia, ut dicitur in secundo de Anima." *In Lib. de Causis,* lect. 18. St. Thomas likens the union of the intellect with its species to the union of the soul and body. Cf. *In I Sent.,* d. 35, 1. 1 ad 3. This is meant, of course, to be only an analogy, since these two unions are radically different. For some of these differences, cf. Cajetan, *In I Summae Theologicae,* 14. 1.

[10] "Quodcumque enim recipitur in altero, secundum modum recipientis recipitur." *In II de An.,* lect. 24, 552.

[11] That is to say, the faculty and the species are *also* united in a physical union resembling that of matter and form, for the cognoscitive species is an accident inhering in its subject. But this aspect of the union is, as John of St. Thomas says, *per accidens* to the intentional or cognitive union. "Generaliter vero in omni cognitione id requiritur, quia unio obiecti ad potentiam non debet fieri solum realiter et secundum conditiones et modum unionis realis et entitativae, tum quia sine ulla alteratione et immutatione physica ipsius potentiae fit; tum quia non ordinatur ad constituendum unum esse physicum vel naturam ex potentia et obiecto, quia repraesentatio sola obiecti non constituit naturam tertiam, quae ex repraesentatione et potentia coalescat, quia si natura resultans est quaedam physica natura, non potest constare aliquo, quod sit tantum repraesentatio, et non physicum. Solum ergo potentiam repraesentative et cognoscibiliter perficit et cum ea componit intentionaliter, non physice, licet ut accidens inhaerens est, etiam physice actuet. Sed hoc per accidens est ad formalitatem speciei, ut vice obiecti praecise repraesentat." *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus, Philosophia Naturalis* (ed. Marietti), IV, 6. 2. As far as I know, St. Thomas does not explicitly discuss this twofold aspect of the union between the faculty and its species.

[12] Since form is the principle of action, while matter, being the ultimate subject of change, is the principle of passion, the assimilation pertains to form. Cf. *De Ver.,* 19. 1 sed contra; *ST,* I, 79. 2 ad 1.

[13] For a more detailed study of the differences between a material and intentional union, cf. Cajetan, *In I Summae Theologicae,* 50. 2c. and Ferrariensis, *In II Contra Gentiles,* 82. The treatment of the latter of the various differences between sensation and intellection, the role of the organ in sensation and the part played there by the conditions of matter, is enlightening and worthy of careful study.

Accompanying both receptions has been a real change, an *alteration,* since both recipients have *become other* than they formerly were. In the physical reception, however, the incoming form, uniting with and actuating the subjective potency of the patient, has driven out the form that was its contrary; the new form is educed from the potency of matter and the old form returns to potency. Hence the change in which this takes place is rightly called an *alteratio corruptiva.*[14]

In the cognoscitive union, on the other hand, the incoming form being received according to an immaterial mode of being, *sine materia,* unites immaterially and formally with the faculty, perfecting it as act (*actus secundus*) perfects active potency. And consequently to this change St. Thomas gives the name *alteratio perfectiva.*[15] By this alteration the patient is perfected through the reception of a form without the loss of corruption of another form occurring concomitantly. To grasp the difference between a change that perfects the thing changed and one that does not is to approach in some way an understanding of the difference between material and spiritual assimilation of form. For example, when colored light falls upon the dust particles in the air, it lights up the air and causes it to glow; so that one can say in a real physical sense that the air has taken on certain of the properties of the light. On the other hand, when colored light falls upon the eye, the eye does not take on the properties of the light and glow as the particles of dust; but instead the eye assimilates the light according to its own nature and manner of be-

[14] "Dicendum est autem, quod duplex est alteratio. Una quidem passiva, secundum quam ita aliquid abjicitur, quod etiam aliquid aliud additur; sicut cum aliquid alteratur de calido in frigidum amittit calorem, et recipit frigiditatem . . ." *In I de Coelo et Mundo,* lect. 7. "Respondeo. Dicendum quod passio dupliciter dicitur. Uno modo proprie; et sic pati dicitur quod a sua naturali dispositione removetur. Passio enim est effectus actionis; in rebus autem naturalibus contraria agunt et patiuntur ad invicem, quorum unum removet alterum a sua naturali dispositione." *ST,* I, 97. 2c. St. Thomas gives the following requirements for this type of *alteratio:* "Ad hoc autem quod sit alteratio, requiritur ex parte alterati quod sit res per se subsistens . . . et ulterius quod habeat naturam contrarietati subjectam, quia alteratio est motus inter contrarias qualitates. Ex parte vero terminorum alterationis requiritur quod una qualitate expulsa, alia introducatur; sic enim de qualitate in qualitatem transitur. Sed ulterius ad rationem passionis requiritur quod qualitas introducta sit extranea, et qualitas abjecta sit connaturalis; quod contingit ex hoc quod passio importat quamdam victoriam agentis super patiens; omne autem quod vincitur, quasi trahitur extra terminos proprios ad terminos alienos." *In III Sent.,* d. 15, 2. 1 sol. 1.

[15] "Est autem alteratio perfectiva, quae fit secundum quod aliquid ab alio perficitur absque alterius abjectione; qualem alterationem ponit Philosophus in *II de Anima,* etiam in potentia sensitiva." *In I de Coelo et Mundo,* lect. 7. "Sed quia potentiae apprehensivae sensitivae sunt tantum in recipiendo speciem, quae quidem non recipitur in sensu per modum rei, sed per modum intentionis; ideo in operatione harum virium est quidem aliquo modo pati, quantum ad hoc quod sunt vires materiales, et quantum ad hoc quod aliquid recipitur (et propter hoc dicitur in *II de Anima* quod sentire est quoddam pati)." *In III Sent.,* d. 15, 2. 1 sol. 2.

ing.[16] This change or alteration perfects the eye, for it is ordered to the good of its nature, which is to see.[17] In this spiritual reception lies the uniqueness and, if you will, the mystery of the intentional order of being. Here we have the generation of a new (intelligible) form without the corruption of any preceding form.[18]

Because of the difference between these two types of alteration, St. Thomas can make at this juncture an important distinction that should prove of interest to those Augustinians who maintain unequivocally that an agent is always superior to a patient. Although, remarks St. Thomas, it is certainly true that what is active is, speaking absolutely and with respect to the same thing, nobler than what is passive, yet it may happen that some passive thing will be nobler than the *actio* which the agent exercises upon it.[19] This is true in the case of the passive reception that takes place in sensation and intellection, where an abstraction is made from matter and the reception is immaterial. Where the form or species is received *sine materia* and thus according to a nobler manner of being than the material

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[16] "Sed quia sensus non movetur a sensibili secundum conditionem moventis, cum forma sensibilis non recipiatur in sensu secundum esse materiale prout est in sensibili, sed secundum esse spirituale, quod est proprium sensui (unde non habet contrarietatem ad sensum, sed est perfectio ejus, nisi secundum quod excedit proportionem sensus); ideo non *proprie* dicitur pati, nisi secundum quod excellentia sensibilium corrumpit sensum, aut debilitat." *In III Sent.*, d. 15, 2. 1 sol. 2.

[17] "Alio modo dicitur passio communiter secundum quamcumque mutationem, etiam si pertineat ad perfectionem naturae; sicut 'intelligere vel sentire dicitur pati quoddam.'" *ST*, I, 97. 2c. "Nam sentire et dormire non removent hominem a naturali dispositione, sed ad bonum naturae ordinantur." *Ibid.*, ad. 1. The whole question of *alteratio* in St. Thomas is of the utmost importance for the proper understanding of his theory of *passio* as variously applied to organic changes, both substantial and accidental (*In VII Physic.*, lect. 4), to the sense and rational appetites (*In III Sent.*, d. 15, 2. 1 sol. 2), to sense and intellectual cognition (*In I Sent.*, d. 17, 2. 1 ad 5; *De Ver.*, 26. 3c; *Quaest. de An.*, a. 20), and, finally, to the virtues (*De Virt. in Comm.*, a. 11 ad 11; *De Ver.*, 26. 3 ad 12). The most proper meaning of *alteratio*, which is *alteratio passiva* or *corruptiva*, is found in the third species of quality. "Alteratio est motus secundum qualitatem, ut dictum est in *V Physicorum;* alteratio autem, ut in *VII Physicorum* ostensum est, proprie fit secundum tertiam speciem qualitatis, quae est passio et passibilis qualitas." *In I de Coelo et Mundo*, lect. 7. In the organic world, this type of alteration is most properly found in the changes undergone by the sense appetites (*In III Sent.*, d. 15, 2. 1 sol. 2). The alteration that takes place at the various levels of cognition is *improprie et per posterius* (*ST*, I-II, 52. 1 ad 3).

[18] "Tertio dicitur aliquid pati communiter ex hoc solo quod id quod est in potentia ad aliquid, recipit illud ad quod erat in potentia, absque hoc quod aliquid abiiciatur. Secundum quem modum omne quod exit de potentia in actum potest dici pati, etiam cum perficitur. Et sic intelligere nostrum est pati." *ST*, I, 79. 2c.

[19] "Ad quintum dicendum, quod quamvis activum simpliciter sit passivo nobilius respectu ejusdem; nihil tamen prohibet aliquod passivum activo nobilius esse, inquantum passivum nobiliori passione patitur quam sit actio qua activum agit; sicut passio a qua intellectus possibilis dicitur passiva potentia. Et etiam sensus recipiendo aliquid immaterialiter, est nobilior actione qua potentia vegetativa agit materialiter, idest mediantibus qualitatibus elementaribus." *De Ver.*, 26. 3 ad. 5. Cf. also *ST*, I, 79. 2 ad. 3.

form by which the agent acts, passion will be more perfect than action.

So far then, we have seen that every cognitive act caused by the thing and considered as a process or *fieri* necessitates some kind of abstraction from matter. St. Thomas had reached this conclusion by an analysis of the change or *fieri* that precedes the act of cognition itself. There is always present in this type of cognition a certain abstractive process making cognition possible and terminating in the cognitive act. It is this act or term of the *fieri* that we must now investigate; for our text is concerned with the very act of knowledge. "The intellect knows by abstracting from matter and the conditions of matter."[20] If there is effected in the *fieri*, in the process from potency to act, a certain abstraction or removal from matter, then in the term of the process, in the act of cognition itself, there will be present, a fortiori, some immateriality or removal from matter. In point of fact, abstraction from matter flows from the very nature of the cognitive act itself, in the sense that any analysis of the nature of cognition points necessarily to immateriality as its ultimate root; for it is removal from matter that conditions the intentional union that formally constitutes cognition. It is by this union that the knowing subject is enriched with the form of the thing known.[21] The act of cognition is an act of union, an assimilation of form by form. If one is to understand this act, passively and actively, at its different levels of perfection, then the terms of this union should be constantly and concomitantly kept in mind.[22] Since each of the terms in the cognitive union is some form, the different perfections of this act will follow the different perfections of these forms. Every form is perfect according as it is in act, and more or less perfect as it is more or less in act.[23] But what is it that limits act and thus limits the activity of forms that possess the act? This question brings us to the very heart of the metaphysics of cognition. In a way it brings

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[20] Strictly speaking, it is not the *intellect* that knows, but man that knows *through* his intellect. *Actiones sunt suppositorum.* (Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 5, 1. 1c.) But the intellect is the elicitive principle of this act.

[21] This is brought out in the following text: "Invenitur alius modus perfectionis in rebus creatis, secundum quod perfectio quae est propria unius rei, in altera re invenitur; et haec est perfectio cognoscentis inquantum est cognoscens; quia secundum hoc a cognoscente aliquid cognoscitur quod ipsum cognitum aliquo modo est apud cognoscentem. Perfectio autem unius rei in altera esse non potest secundum determinatum esse quod habebat in re illa; et ideo ad hoc quod nata sit esse in re altera, oportet eam considerare absque his quae nata sunt eam determinare." *De Ver.*, 11. 2c.

[22] "Videmus quod secundum ordinem immaterialitatis in rebus, secundum hoc in eis natura cognitionis invenitur. . . . Et similiter est etiam ordo in cognoscibilibus . . . formae et perfectiones rerum per materiam determinantur; inde est quod secundum hoc est aliqua res cognoscibilis secundum quod a materia separatur." *Ibid.* Cf. also *In I Sent.*, d. 35, 1. 1 ad 3.

[23] "Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum, secundum quod est actu, nam perfectum dicitur, cui nihil deest secundum modum suae perfectionis." *ST*, I, 4. 1c. "Unumquodque perfectum est in quantum est actu." *CG*, I, 28. ". . . forma perficitur per hoc quod es actu . . ." *Ibid*, III, 66.

us to the very heart of metaphysics itself. Act, says St. Thomas,—and of all Thomistic principles perhaps none is more important—is not limited as act except by the potency which receives it.[24] Consequently, every form, in so far as it is form, has about it a certain infinity; and this is true whether this form exists in the physical[25] or intentional[26] order. The chief potential drag upon these forms, whose activity enables them to reproduce themselves again and again in the physical and cognitive orders, is matter.[27] Consequently, the activity of each form in matter will be more or less perfect or more or less limited as it is free from or restricted to its matter.[28]

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[24] "Actus in nullo existens, nullo terminatur." *CG*, I, 43. "Nullus enim actus invenitur finiri nisi per potentiam quae est ejus receptiva." *Compendium Theologiae*, I, 18.

[25] "Forma vero finitur per materiam, inquantum forma, in se considerata, communis est ad multa; sed per hoc quod recipitur in materia, fit forma determinate huius rei. . . . Forma autem non perficitur per materiam, sed magis per eam eius amplitudo contrahitur; unde infinitum secundum quod se tenet ex parte formae non determinatae per materiam, habet rationem perfecti." *ST*, I, 7. 1c.

[26] "Cum igitur unicuique rei competat propria operatio, secundum quod habet esse. eo quod unumquodque operatur inquantum est ens; oportet operationes animae considerare, secundum quod invenitur in viventibus.

Huiusmodi autem viventia inferiora, quorum actus est anima, de qua nunc agitur, habent duplex esse. Unum quidem materiale, in quo conveniunt cum aliis rebus materialibus. Aliud autem immateriale, in quo communicant cum substantiis superioribus aliqualiter.

Est autem differentia inter utrumque esse: quia secundum esse materiale, quod est per materiam contractum, unaquaeque res est hoc solum quod est, sicut hic lapis, non est aliud quam hic lapis; secundum vero esse immateriale, quod est amplum, et quodammodo infinitum, inquantum non est per materiam terminatum, res non solum est id quod est, sed etiam est quodammodo alia." *In II de An.*, lect. 5, 281-83. It would be well to point out at this juncture that the word *immaterialis* in St. Thomas is susceptible, in general, of a two-fold meaning. In its first general meaning it is used to describe those things which is their being and in their actions are intrinsically independent of matter. Hence the angels and the soul would be in this sense immaterial. (Cf. *ST*, I, 12. 4c.) In its second general meaning it is used to describe the reception of the form that takes place in cognition as opposed to mere physical or material reception. In this sense it is used as a synonym for intentional or spiritual. (Cf. *In II de An.*, lects. 4, 24.) Applying this terminology we would say that while a sense faculty is entirely material in so far as it depends intrinsically upon matter for its being and operation, it receives its species immaterially in so far as it assimilates a form according to its own and not the agent's manner of being.

[27] Cf. *De Ver.*, 2. 2c.

[28] "Unde manifestum est quod ratio cognitionis ex opposito se habet ad rationem materialitatis. Et ideo quae non recipiunt formas nisi materialiter, nullo modo sunt cognoscitiva, sicut plantae, ut dicitur in II libro *De An.* Quanto autem aliquid immaterialius habet formam rei cognitae, tanto perfectius cognoscit." *ST*, I, 84. 2c. "Quanto forma est nobilior, tanto in suo esse semper excedit materiam." *CG*, II, 68. "Ad secundum dicendum, quod quandocumque conjunguntur duo quorum unum est potentius altero, et trahit ad se illud, habet aliquam virtutem praeter illud quod sibi subjicitur; ut patet in flamma; quia ignis vincens vaporem cui conjungitur, habet virtutem illuminandi, ultra quam possit se extendere actio vaporis incensi calefaciendo. Cum ergo in conjunctione formae ad materiam forma inveniatur dominans; quanto forma est nobilior, et magis vincens materiam, tanto magis poterit habere virtutem

St. Thomas makes constant use of this principle of the limitation of form by matter to explain the difference that exists between beings that are capable of knowledge and those that are not capable.[29] Beings that are restricted to their own form only cannot possess knowledge, which consists in having the forms of other things, while beings that have knowledge, besides possessing their own forms by which they exist in the physical order, are capable also of possessing the forms of other things,[30] not physically, for this would be a contradiction, but as has been seen, immaterially or intentionally. These latter beings have a greater amplitude of activity and are less restricted by matter than beings that cannot know. And since this limitation and restriction of form is due to matter, the *raison d'être* of every act of cognition consists in a certain immateriality or removal from matter. This is true both from the side of the knowing subject, and from the side of the thing known. The greater the degree of this immateriality, the more active will be the form and the more perfect the cognition.[31]

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praeter conditionem materiae. Unde quaedam corpora mixta praeter virtutes qualitatum activarum et passivarum, quae tenent se ex parte materiae, habent quasdam virtutes quae consequuntur speciem, ut quod magnes attrahit ferrum; et magis hoc invenitur in plantis, ut patet in augmento quod terminatur per virtutem animae, quod non posset esse per virtutem ignis, ut dicitur 2 *de Anima* (text. 41); et hoc adhuc invenitur plus in animalibus, quia sentire omnino est supra virtutem qualitatum elementarium; et perfectissime in anima rationali, quae est nobilissima formarum; et ideo ipsa habet quasdam virtutes in quibus nullo modo communicat corpus, et quasdam in quibus communicat." *In II Sent.*, d. 17, 2. 1 ad 2.

[29] A summary of these principles, and of all that has been said so far, is found in *ST*, I, 14. 1c.

[30] For a fine study of this *receptio formae alterius rei*, cf. John of St. Thomas, *op. cit.*, t. IV, 4. 1. Here we find the following important remark: "Ubi adverto non dixisse D. Thomam, quod cognoscentia possunt habere formam alteram, sed formam rei alterius. Nam illa forma est altera, id est distincta a se et ab extrinseco proveniens, sed non est alterius, quia, hoc ipso, quod in se recipitur, fit sua, ita quod non pertinet ad alterum, sed ad se. . . . Cognoscentia autem in hoc elevantur super non cognoscentia, quia id, quod est alterius ut alterius, seu prout manet distinctum in altero, possunt in se recipere."

[31] Cf. the important text in *CG*, II, 68. These grades of perfection are well brought out in the following text: "Oportet autem in actionibus animae tres gradus considerare. Actio enim animae transcendit actionem naturae in rebus inanimatis operantis; sed hoc contingit quantum ad duo; scilicet quantum ad modum agendi, et quantum ad id quod agitur. Oportet autem quod quantum ad modum agendi omnis actio animae transcendat operationem vel actionem naturae inanimati; quia cum actio animae sit actio vitae, vivum autem est quod seipsum movet ad operandum; oportet quod omnis operatio animae sit secundum aliquod intrinsecum agens. Sed quantum ad id quod agitur, non omnis actio transcendit actionem naturae inanimati; oportet enim quod fit, esse naturale, et quae ad ipsum requiruntur, sic in corporibus inanimatis, sicut in corporibus animatis; sed in corporibus inanimatis fit ab agente extrinseco, in corporibus vero animatis ab agente intrinseco; et hujusmodi sunt actiones ad quas ordinantur potentiae animae vegetabilis. Nam ad hoc quod individuum producatur in esse, ordinatur potentia generativa; ad hoc autem quod quantitatem debitam consequatur, ordinatur vis augmentativa; ad hoc autem quod conservetur in esse, ordinatur vis nutritiva. Haec autem consequuntur corpora inanimata ab agente naturali extrinseco tantum; et propter hoc praedictae

Cognition, then, inasmuch as it is a type of activity and an immanent operation, flows from the principle of all activity, which is form.[32] In the lower stretches of the hierarchy of being, where, far removed from the supreme perfection of pure act, things approach more and more to the pure potentiality of prime matter, forms are so entirely immersed in matter[33] that in their operations they are strictly limited; for almost all their activity is absorbed in informing and actuating the matter.[34] As we ascend the scale of being and form approaches closer to the Pure Act that contains all perfections, it is more and more freed from the limiting forces of pure potency,[35] and in many of its activities acquires a certain independence from matter. One of these activities is cognition, whose very nature as an immaterial union with the form of the thing known requires a certain removal, a certain immunity, from matter;[36] for matter is subjective potency and as such is the ultimate subject of every material union, whereas cognition in its term is an immaterial and formal union.

The Thomistic analysis of cognition thus reveals that all human cognition, in so far as it is human and in so far as it is cognition—that is, considered both as a process (or *fieri*) and as an intentional union of form with form—involves some removal from matter. The

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vires animae dicuntur naturales. Sunt autem aliae altiores actiones animae, qua transcendunt actiones formarum naturalium, etiam quantum ad id quod agitur; inquantum scilicet in anima sunt nata esse omnia secundum esse immateriale. Est enim anima quodammodo omnia secundum quod est sentiens et intelligens. Oportet autem esse diversum gradum hujusmodi esse immaterialis. Unus enim gradus est secundem quod in anima sunt res sine propriis materiis; sed tamen secundum singularitatem, et conditiones individuales, quae consequunter materiam; et iste est gradus sensus, qui est susceptivus specierum individualium sine materia, sed tamen in organo corporali. Altior autem et perfectissimus immaterialitatis gradus est intellectus, qui recipit species omnino a materia et conditionibus materiae abstractas, et absque organo corporali." *Quaest. de An.*, a. 13c. Cf. also *ST*, I, 12. 4c.

[32] "Illa enim quae est in intellectu nostro, est accepta a re secundum quod res agit in intellectum nostrum, agendo per prius in sensu; materia autem, propter debilitatem sui esse, quia est in potentia ens tantum, non potest esse principium agendi; et ideo res quae agit in animam nostram, agit solum per formam; unde similitudo rei quae imprimitur in sensum, et per quosdam gradus depurata, usque ad intellectum pertingit, est tantum similitudo formae." *De Ver.*, 2. 5c.

[33] Between this pure potency of prime matter and the forms which it limits there is a transcendental relation, so that each can communicate to the other *immediately* its own proper reality.

[34] Cf. *ST*, I, 14. 1c; *CG*, II, 68.

[35] "Non est etiam verum quod corpora sint in ultima remotione a Deo. Cum enim Deus sit actus purus, secundum hoc aliqua magis vel minus ab eo distant secundum quod sunt plus vel minus in actu vel in potentia. Illud etiam in entibus est extreme distans a Deo quod est potentia tantum, scilicet materia prima; unde ejus tantum est pati et non agere. Corpora vero, cum sint composita ex materia et forma, accedunt ad divinam similitudinem inquantum habent formam, quam Aristoteles nominat divinum quoddam; et propter hoc, secundum quod habent formam, agunt; secundum vero quod habent materiam, patiuntur." *CG*, III, 69.

[36] Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 35, 1. 1c.

process of human cognition is abstractive and the mode of being of the term or act of cognition is immaterial.

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# DEMOCRACY—STALIN AND ST. THOMAS

MANY PEOPLE are surprised and puzzled when they hear Stalin and Molotoff saying that Soviet Russia is a democracy. They would be still more surprised if they knew that St. Thomas Aquinas would agree with them. Yet that is the fact.

St. Thomas took over from Aristotle the classic division of forms of good government into three: monarchy, aristocracy, and what he calls polity.[1] This division is made according to the number who rule. If one rules, we have a monarchy; if a few rule, we have an aristocracy; if the multitude rules, we have a polity. These are three Greek words, meaning literally: one-rule, best-rule, city-rule.

These are the good forms of government, and the criterion of good rule is whether it governs for the common good.[2] In all of them, government, by one or few or many, serves the interest of all, and, as St. Thomas remarks, is rightly called the people's servant, directing them to the common good.

In like manner there are three bad forms of government, in all of which the rulers govern in their own interest and not for the common good.[3] If one man rules the people solely for his own profit and interest, he is a tyrant. If a few rule for themselves and their friends, they are an oligarchy. If the masses dominate to the exclusion of all other classes, they are, in the words of Aristotle and St. Thomas, a democracy. These are the three bad forms.

Let us look at what the two philosophers say. Aristotle tells us that "tyranny is a kind of monarchy which has in view the interest of the monarch only; oligarchy has in view the interest of the wealthy; democracy looks to the interest of the poor. None of them looks to the common good of all."[4] St. Thomas, in his commentary on this passage, says: "Tyranny is the rule of one seeking his own interests. The rule of a few seeks the interests of the rich. The popular state (*democratia*) seeks the interests of the poor."[5]

Aristotle then goes on to say that the real distinction to be kept in

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[1] *In III Polit.*, lect. 6.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Politica* iii. 7, 1279b.
[5] *In III Polit.*, lect. 6: ". . . tyrannis est principatus unius intendens utilitatem propriam. Paucorum status vero est intendens ad utilitatem divitum. Popularis status vero ad utilitatem pauperum . . ."

mind here is that the rich are few and the poor many, and that is really why we call one of these perverted states an oligarchy and the other democracy. *Demos* is many, but only the few are wealthy.

In his treatise *The Governance of Rulers,* St. Thomas speaking of an oligarchy, says:

> It occurs when a few, who differ from the tyrant only by the fact that they are more than one, oppress the people by means of their wealth. If, however, the bad government is carried on by the multitude, it is called a democracy, that is, control by the populace. This comes about when the plebeian populace by force of numbers oppress the wealthy. In this way the whole people will be as one tyrant.[6]

Now if we take the words of Aristotle and St. Thomas and translate them into modern parlance, what do we have? For "tyrant" we can read "dictator"; for "the wealthy" we can read "bourgeoisie"; for "the poor" we can read "proletariate." For "democracy," therefore, we can read "dictatorship of the proletariate." The words of Aristotle and Aquinas make it clear that this is what they have in mind.

When, therefore, St. Thomas called democracy the third of the perverted forms of government, he was thinking of a government where the proletariate rose up against the bourgeoisie, "oppressed" (read, of course, "liquidated") it, and ran the state wholly according to personal interests.[7]

It is, I suppose, unnecessary to point out that this is precisely what Stalin and Molotoff have in mind when they call Soviet Russia a democracy. They are in eminently good company. I used to think they had their tongues in their cheeks when they talked this way; but lately, ruminating over Aristotle and Aquinas, I have come to see that they are speaking in perfectly good faith. They really mean that their state is a democracy, in the very sense used by the ancients. (And of course they call our democracy an oligarchy.)

Stalin's power is based on the workers; and the Supreme Soviet all the way down to the village soviets shows a chain of workers' clubs, within which each one elects his ruler, at least in theory. But the emphasis on democracy in the Russians' minds is not so much on self-government as on the proletariate's possessing power.

How long Russia can remain this way is, of course, a question. Political philosophers have always considered this kind of state unstable. St. Thomas, for instance, held that it always paved the way for a tyrant and that this in turn would bring a revolution that might be good or bad.

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[6] *De Regimine Principum,* I, 1: ". . . quando scilicet pauci propter Divitias opprimunt plebem, sola pluralitate a tyranno differentes. Si vero iniquum regimen exerceatur per multos, 'Democratia' nuncupatur, idest potentatus populi, quando scilicet populus plebeiorum per potentiam multitudinis opprimit divites. Sic enim et populus totus erit quasi unus tyrannus."

[7] *Ibid.,* 1 and 6; *In III Polit.,* lect. 8.

If any have been scandalized that St. Thomas, following Aristotle, reserved the word *democracy* for this kind of state, let me remind them that he did know and approve of a state in which there is self-government by the many. I have said that he called it, again following Aristotle, a "polity." What Aristotle and St. Thomas had in mind was something like the city-states of Greece and Italy; but unfortunately what they knew of these did not stir up any liking or favor.[8]

In the polity of the city-states there was what we call "pure democracy," in which the whole people votes directly on every issue in a town meeting. Our modern representative systems, which make it possible for large countries to be democracies, were unknown. But the principle is the same. Polity is a good form if all the interests of all the people are taken into account in its government.

St. Thomas's personal preference in the abstract was for a monarchy, on the purely metaphysical ground that since the end of the state is unity, the "Unity of Peace," there must be only one who rules; for the cause must be proportionate to the effect.[9] Suarez, commenting on this later, pointed out that the oneness of the ruler or government need not necessarily be physical. It could be a moral unity, composed of several, but working together.

When it came to the state in the concrete, however, St. Thomas was not altogether for a kingdom. What he wanted was a "mixed" form, in which all three of the good forms had a place. The passage is too striking and modern to leave unquoted here. He begins by laying down the general principle that "all should have some share in the government." He goes on:

> Accordingly the best form of government is in a state or kingdom wherein one is given the power to preside over all, while under him are others having governing powers; and yet a government of this kind is shared by all, both because all are eligible to govern and because the rulers are chosen by all. For this is the best form of polity, being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, insofar as a number of persons are set in authority; and partly democracy, i.e., government by the people, insofar as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers.[10]

It will be noticed that he here uses the word *democracy* in our modern sense, not in the ancient and Russian sense, and therefore feels obliged to define it. But who can help being struck by the

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[8] *In II Polit.*, lects. 7-17.

[9] *De Regimine Principum*, I, 2.

[10] *ST*, I-II, 105. 1c: "Unde optima ordinatio principum est in aliqua civitate vel regno, in qua unus praeficitur secundum virtutem qui omnibus praesit; et sub ipso sunt aliqui principantes secundum virtutem; et tamen talis principatus ad omnes pertinet, tum quia ex omnibus eligi possunt, tum quia etiam ab omnibus eliguntur. Talis enim est optima politia, bene commixta ex regno, inquantum unus praeest; et aristocratia, inquantum multi principantur secundum virtutem; et ex democratia, idest potestate populi, inquantum ex popularibus possunt eligi principes, et ad populum pertinet electio principum."

resemblance his ideal form has to our American system, where we have a single executive at the head, others beside him in the supreme government, and still others in the State governments?

Did the Founding Fathers have this political theory in mind? It may well be that it had reached them through various channels. St. Robert Bellarmine, for instance, took up the idea, and his writings were not unknown to political thinkers in the eighteenth century.

What is really important, however, in this connection is St. Thomas's insistence on the monarchical principle and its survival in our own form of constitutional government. Hilaire Belloc liked to say that the American government is not a democracy or a republic, but a monarchy. His reason for saying it was that the executive in our system is one single man, the President; his Cabinet is merely an extension of his person; and the Departments merely act in his name.

I think St. Thomas would find this quite proper. After all, when he is arguing for a monarchy as the source of unity, it is unity of action he has mostly in mind, and unity of action in the people is the result of executive action at the head.[11] He would not necessarily ask for a single legislator, the more so as in his time, before the Roman Law had completely pushed out Western concepts, law was largely a matter of custom and preceded the ruler. Hence I think we can well say that our monarchical Executive was mostly the kind of thing he had in mind.

However all this may be, Aristotle and St. Thomas both knew, or reasoned to, the kind of government that Russia has, if not to the kind the United States has. That they called the Russian kind democracy is unfortunate, but not more unfortunate than that Stalin and Molotoff call it that, too. But at least perhaps we can now grant that these two men are not merely fooling when they talk as they do but are seriously defending a system that was known and condemned many centuries ago.

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[11] *De Regimine Principum*, I, 2.

# THE PROBLEM OF ACTION IN THE COMMENTARY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE PHYSICS OF ARISTOTLE

## PART I

### MOTION

ARISTOTLE'S SOLUTION of the problem of change is a key to the whole metaphysics of the Philosopher and to St. Thomas's interpretation and development of the problem of action. Aristotle explains change by the concepts of act and potency. Act signifies perfection; potency denotes capacity for perfection. To understand change we must postulate a medium between being in act and non-being; this medium is *being in potency*. Hence motion can be explained as the passing from potency to act. It is the act of a being in potency in so far as it is in potency.[1] Whereas Aristotle considers this problem mainly in the realm of locomotion, St. Thomas Aquinas raises the problem to the level of change as such.[2] He recognizes, of course, that motion in its strict sense is of the accidental order; substantial change is properly generation or corruption.[3] Yet even substantial change is accompanied by motion, at least *per accidens*. Motion requires a subject—a subject that being one thing becomes another. For if the subject actually possessed the perfection to be achieved, it could not be moved. Therefore the subject must be in potency to the new perfection. Further, there must be an agent that produces the new actuality in the subject.[4] Finally, there is a transition from potency to act, this transition being the essence of motion. Thus motion is an *actus imperfectus:* it is act in regard to its *terminus a quo* and potency in regard to the *terminus ad quem*.[5] This motion as from the agent implies action; as in the patient, it is passion. Hence the concepts of action and passion depend on the reality of motion. Motion is from contrary to contrary, and it requires a constant subject. It is in the body that is being moved. For motion is not the actuation of the mover as mover but of the

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[1] Cf. Aristotle *Physics* iii. 1. 201a. 28.

[2] ". . . moveri dicuntur sive secundum substantiam, sive secundum quantitatem, sive secundum qualitatem, sive secundum locum, inquantum exeunt de potentia in actum." *In Lib. de Div. Nom.*, IV, 7.

[3] Cf. *In V Phys.*, lect. 2, where St. Thomas distinguishes between motion and mutation.

[4] "Omne autem quod movetur, ab alio movetur. Nihil enim movetur, nisi secundum quod est in potentia ad illud ad quod movetur; movet autem aliquid secundum quod est actu." *ST*, I, 2. 3.

[5] Cf. *In III Phys.*, lect. 2.

mobile, which is in potency to the new perfection that is to be achieved by the motion. The act that is motion is in the mobile though caused by the mover. What the mover by its action causes is the same as that which the moved as patient receives. Thus motion as it proceeds from the mover is the act of the mover; as it is received in the mobile it is the act of the mobile. For it is manifest that the act of anything is in that of which it is the act; and thus it is clear that the act of motion is in the mobile, since it is the act of the mobile caused in it by the mover.[6]

Now the motion as from the agent is action; as in the patient, it is passion. Motion as such requires successive duration.[7] Therefore it is proper to material beings, which are composed of parts. Action and passion as implied by motion will be only analogously attributed to change in the spiritual order.

Before we examine action and passion, it is important to note that motion abstracts from the terms, that is, from a consideration of the agent or the patient.[8] That motion can not be identified with action or passion will be shown later. Movement is a positive reality as a continuum; yet the whole continuum never exists as such but only as a continuous succession; that is, motion does not consist of a series of successive points or states. It is of the nature of a continuum to be only *potentially* divisible; as a continuum it is essentially single and undivided. The succession viewed as a whole exists only in the mind that makes a unity out of this fleeting continuum that is motion. Finally, as motion is an *actus imperfectus*, it is not in any genus directly but is reduced to the genus of its *terminus ad quem*.[9]

Motion in the concrete introduces two categories: action and passion. Motion as in the patient and from the agent—*motus ut ab hoc*—is action; motion is called passion as it is the act of the patient as in it: "Motus autem dicitur actio secundum quod est actus agentis ut ab hoc; dicitur autem passio secundum quod est actus patientis ut in hoc."[10] Since the heart of the issue is the problem of where action is and the distinction of action from motion and passion, it will be necessary to develop these questions in more detail later.

First we shall examine the meaning of passion and then proceed to an analysis of the meaning of action in general. This analysis of

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[6] "Manifestum est enim quod actus cuiuslibet est in eo cuius est actus; et sic manifestum est quod actus motus est in mobile, cum sit actus mobilis, causatus tamen in eo a movente." *In III Phys.*, lect. 4.

[7] Cf. *In VI Phys.*, lect. 7.

[8] ". . . motus abstrahit ab utroque termino . . ." *In II Sent.*, d. 40, 1. 4 ad 1.

[9] "Motus reducitur ad genus et speciem eius ad quod terminatur motus; inquantum eadem forma est quae ante motum est tantum in potentia, in ipso motu medio modo inter actum et potentiam, et in termino motus in actu completo." *Quaest. de An.*, a. 7 ad 3. Cf. *De Pot.*, 3. 3 ad 8.

[10] *In III Phys.*, lect. 5.

action will introduce the problem of the distinction between transient and immanent action. In turn, the nature of immanent action will be understood in its full meaning by considering what is implied by the term *actus perfecti*. By following such a procedure we may hope to achieve a more complete grasp of the nature of action. Thus the way will be prepared for the presentation and solution of the problem of transient action.

## PASSION

Passion is one of the ten predicaments.[11] St. Thomas points out that these predicaments are derived from an analysis of predication. When the denomination is by reason of something partially outside the subject, as agent or efficient cause, we have the predicament of passion; for *pati* is nothing else than to receive something from the agent.[12]

The medium between the agent and the patient is motion.[13] It is only when there is motion that action of necessity implies passion. For only transient action—action passing into an effect—must have as its converse, passion:

> Operatio enim agentis quaedam est ut transiens in effectum, et haec proprie actio vel passio dicitur: et tali actioni semper respondet e converso passio; unde invenitur calefactio actio et calefactio passio, et similiter creatio actio et creatio passio.[14]

But, St. Thomas concludes, this is not true of immanent action as such.

Passion, which is in the patient as long as it is changing, implies a relation in the subject receiving the passion. After the completion of the motion, the patient has a *received* act—received from the agent. Without doubt the patient is a patient because of the movement it suffers. But it is not called a patient merely because the movement is accomplished in it. It is a patient inasmuch as the movement is an *effect*, that is, a dependent thing. Otherwise motion would be confused with passion.[15] Hence passion does not merely imply movement or motion accomplished in the patient; rather, it implies that this motion is a dependent thing, an effect of an agent that is in act. It is in the *reception* of motion that the true nature of passion is had. Passion implies that the patient is being moved and that the motion is a certain reality of some perfection that is continuously being acquired by the mobile. (Continuously, for, as we have noted, passion is had only when there is motion, and motion implies continuous

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[11] Cf. *ibid.*

[12] More will be said on the predicaments in a later part of the article, where the meaning and distinction of the predicaments is considered.

[13] Cf. *De Pot.*, 7. 10 ad 1.

[14] *In I Sent.*, d. 40, 1. 1 ad 1. Cf. *ST*, I, 41. 1 ad 3.

[15] Cf. A.-D. Sertillanges, *S. Thomas D'Aquin*, I, 120.

duration.) It is formally passion inasmuch as we consider this actuality to come extrinsically to the patient and to be properly motion. The word *passio* is more verified as to its proper signification if the form induced be found to be contrary to the disposition of the mobile. For motion, properly speaking, is from contrary to contrary. And the patient, in this instance, would be in no way concurring actively, as the cause would be wholly extrinsic to it.

Though the denomination of patient includes the motion that is received, it includes the motion only materially; formally it is named by its act being from an extrinsic agent.[16] After passion, which lasts only as long as the duration of the motion, there remains some quality that is called by the name passion, but in a different sense. Passions are called such in this latter sense precisely because they are dispositions so named either from having been passive or from having been received from an agent. Passion in this sense is a quality; that it has been received is the reason why this quality that remains is called by the same name as the predicamental passion.[17]

### THE MEANING OF *TO ACT*

Before considering the meaning of action, we must first say something of the meaning of *to act: agere*.[18] To act is to exercise some action—*agere est aliquam actionem exercere*.[19] It is a Scholastic dictum that a thing acts in so far as it is in act: things existing in act can exercise action in so far as they are in act.[20] And as a thing acts in so far as it is in act, the action follows the mode of act in the agent.[21] Thus each thing produces things in its own likeness.[22] Hence we can know a thing from its operation: "Rei cuiuslibet perfecta cognitio haberi non potest nisi eius operatio cognoscitur. Ex modo enim operationis et specie mensura et qualitas virtutis pensatur. Virtus vero naturam rei monstrat."[23] Ferrara comments on this: the operation is proportioned to the power, and the power is proportioned to the nature, of which it is a property. Whether we know a thing a priori or a posteriori—to know a thing we must know its operation. Ferrara asserts that to *modus* and *species* correspond respectively *mensura* and *qualitas*. For the species of the operation is referred to the quality and species of the power; and the mode of operation is referred

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[16] This is the distinction made by Mauri, *Cosmologia*, in *Praelectiones Philosophiae Scholasticae*, Part IV, cap. ii, assertio 76.

[17] Cf. *ibid.* This quality which remains is one of the four subspecies of quality. Cf. Aristotle *Categories* 8b. 25 to 10a. 25.

[18] In the conclusion of this article there will be an attempt to consider more fully the basic meaning and implications of the fundamental notion of "to act."

[19] *De Ver.*, 5. 9.

[20] "Res autem existentes actu possunt agere actiones secundum quod sunt actu." *De Ver.*, 8. 6. Cf. *CG*, I, 28.

[21] Cf. *CG*, II, 21.

[22] Cf. *De Pot.*, 3. 15.

[23] *CG*, II, 1.

to the measure, that is, the degree of the perfection of the power. And when St. Thomas affirms that the species of operation is from the object, this does not contradict the principle that the species of operation is from the form of the agent. For the form of the thing made is conformed to the form of the maker; and universally the term and object of the action is conformed to the principle and power through which the maker operates.[24]

In order to explain how a thing produces its like we must consider the agent in two ways: materially and formally. In both ways the agent produces its like, but differently. If we view the agent materially, the effect is produced inasmuch as its form is in some way in the agent; but the effect is not necessarily in all ways similar to the agent. Thus God has all the perfection of the stone that he creates, but he has it in a higher way; and the stone does not imitate God in every respect, since, for example, the perfection of life is lacking to it. If the agent be considered formally, there must be a similarity between the agent and the effect in regard to the mode of action of the agent. If the agent act only by a part, that is, through the medium of some accidental power, it produces only a part of the effect; if the whole substance acts, the agent can produce the whole effect. Thus only God, who can act substantially, can create, that is, can produce the whole effect and does not require any pre-existing matter.[25]

If we admit that a thing can act in so far as it is in act, we must also admit that creatures can exercise action. That is, we must recognize the reality of secondary causality. When the advocates of occasionalism deny the reality of secondary causes they are ultimately forced to deny the reality of creatures. Thus occasionalism should logically terminate in pantheism. For what good would be the active powers of things if they could not produce any effect? The very being of things would be useless; for nothing exists except for an end, and the end of all things is action or operation.[26] In attempting to elevate the power of the Supreme Cause the occasionalists have lessened it, for they have deprived him of the power of establishing an order of causality. Hence we must admit that secondary causes are true causes, though not completely so in themselves because all actuality comes from God inasmuch as he gives to second causes their being and sustains them in their activity.[27]

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[24] Ferrara, *In II Contra Gentiles,* 1; Nos. 1 and 2, Vol. XIII (Leon. ed.).
[25] *Ibid.,* 16; No. 5, sec. 3.
[26] Cf. *ST,* I, 105. 5; *CG,* III, 69.
[27] No attempt will be made to analyze the relation of primary and secondary causes; this is in itself a problem outside of the one to be considered here. Let it suffice to say that just as creatures, since they are composed of essence and *to be,* depend on *Ipsum Esse* for their existence, they likewise depend on him for his *concursus* in the exercise of their activity. They must be in act in order to act, and their *to act,* as their *to be,* is not only in its origin but in its continuation, a dependent thing. Most of this article will consider the

If we deny things their proper actions, we subtract the meaning of order from the universe:

> Si autem a rebus subtrahantur actiones, subtrahitur ordo rerum ad invicem; rerum enim quae sunt diversae secundum suas naturas non est colligatio in ordinis unitatem, nisi per hoc quod quaedam agunt et quaedam patiuntur. Inconveniens igitur est dicere quod res non habent proprias actiones. . . . Si agere sequitur ad esse in actu; inconveniens est quod actus perfectior actione destituatur.[28]

If things do not have proper actions, we can never learn their natures, for we know the nature of things only from their operations. If a thing act in so far as it is in act and if it be proper to act that it put something to act, it follows that if creatures exist they must be able to act. Hence it is imperative to admit the reality of action and to explain its nature in so far as we are able.

### ACTION

Action, according to the first significance of the term, implies the source of motion.[29] We have seen that in this sense action, like passion, can be numbered among the predicaments. If the agent itself be denominated by the effect, we have the predicament called *action;* for action is simply the act of the agent upon another. Action and passion are two distinct predicaments, for it is one thing to cause motion and another to receive it. Though the motion, which is the bond between them, be one, action and passion can not be identified. This will be shown in more detail later. Action, thus defined, is proper to agents that act by producing motion; for without motion and time there can strictly speaking be neither action nor passion. For if there be nothing between the two terms, there would be only a subject and the thing produced, plus a relation. This does not suffice for the category of action. Yet action, in a wider sense, may be extended to include spiritual activity; in this way action has an analogous rather than an univocal connotation. To make action merely equivocal when used in these two senses would be to misinterpret its parallel usage. Further, there seems to be action with motion that is neither transient nor of the immaterial order;[30] this action is in the realm of lower im-

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order of causality as such, without reference to the dependence of the second cause on the first. It must be kept in mind, however, that the order of causality allotted to creatures is that they be causes of *fieri*, not causes of *esse*. Cf. *De Pot.*, 5. 1 ad 4.

[28] *CG*, III, 69.

[29] ". . . actio secundum primam nominis impositionem importat originem motus. Sicut enim motus, prout est in mobili ab aliquo, dicitur passio, ita origo ipsius motus, secundum quod incipit ab alia et terminatur in id quod movetur, vocatur actio." *ST*, I, 41. 1 ad 2.

[30] Here I am contrasting transient action as it implies motion with spiritual activity which is best expressed in the immanent actions which imply no imperfection. I do not mean to imply that transient activity, at least in an analogous sense, can not be predicated of a spiritual being. Of course, transient action which is *motus ut ab hoc* is found only in material beings, since motion,

manent activity, which forms a sort of bridge between the dichotomy of action that is the perfection of the patient, and the other type of action that is called *actus perfecti.*

Just as in passion, the proper entity of predicamental action lasts only during the motion; after the motion ceases, there is left only the relation of cause to effect and of effect to cause.

### TRANSIENT ACTION

When St. Thomas speaks of action, he usually makes the distinction of action as going into a patient—transient action—and of action as remaining in the agent—immanent action.[31] First we shall speak briefly of transient action. It is this action that is really the focal point of the problem of action as stated in St. Thomas's commentary on the *Physics* of Aristotle.

St. Thomas distinguishes between immanent and transient action thus:

> Est autem duplex rei operatio, ut Philosophus tradit . . . : una quidem, quae in ipso operante manet et est ipsius operantis perfectio, ut sentire,

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strictly speaking, is proper to beings composed of matter and form. But if we take motion in the wider sense as any transition or reduction from potency to act, we must admit that transient action is possible for a purely spiritual being. And this is true in one of two ways; either the spiritual being is the true cause of transient activity (as an angel, for example, can move a body locally) or the spirit receives the action. An example of the latter is the order of grace wherein a created spirit acquires a new accidental form. St. Thomas explains the distinction of this type of transient action from transient action in the material order: "Respondeo dicendum, quod duplex est actio. Quaedam quae fit cum motu; et talis actio semper est cum aliqua innovatione; quia semper in motu aliquid fit, et aliquid desinit esse, inquantum acceditur ad terminum et receditur a termino; et propter hoc Philosophus dicit in 7 Phys. (com. 56) quod in omni motu est quodam modo fieri et corrumpi. Alia autem actio est quae est sine motu, per simplicem communicationem formae; inquantum scilicet agens suam similitudinem imprimit recipiente disposito; et talis actio in principio quidem est cum innovatione, secundum quod de novo acquiritur forma in subiecto; sed continuatio ipsius actionis, sicut nullum habet motum adiunctum, sed simplicem influxum, sive communicationem, ita etiam nullam habet innovationem, et hoc modo causatur gratia a Deo in anima." *Quodlibet. IV,* a. 9. Hence grace implies some "innovation," but not motion but merely a communication of form. That God can not suffer even this type of transient action is clear, since He is all perfect. That His action is not truly transient, as passing into another, will be shown later.

What I would like to stress here is that the action most proper to a spiritual agent is that of immanent activity. But to deny that this agent is also capable of exercising transient action would, for one thing, establish an irreconcilable dualism in man, since he is partly spiritual and partly material. That is, we would be put in the position of denying that the spiritual activities of man could have any effect on his bodily activities.

That there is transient action suffered by a purely immaterial "patient," is emphasized by recalling the fact that new species or forms must be educed in the possible intellect in order that man may understand. But this type of transient action is not the kind that is to be considered at length in this article.

[31] St. Thomas does not speak of "immanent" and "transient" action in just those terms. He usually speaks of them as action or operation "in aliquid extrinsecum transeuntem," and "operationem in operante manentem." Cf. *De Pot.,* 10. 1 ad 1. This is the closest he comes to the later terminology.

> intelligere et velle; alia vero, quae in exteriorem rem transit, quae est perfectio facti quod per ipsam constituitur, ut calefacere, secare et aedificare.[32]

The first is the "perfectio et actus agentis"; the second is that "quae egreditur ab agente in patiens extrinsecum et est perfectio et actus patientis."[33] The second action is common to living and non-living; the first belongs only to living things.[34] As noted above, it is only transient action that necessarily implies a corresponding passion.

As transient action implies the perfecting of the patient rather than the perfecting of the agent, St. Thomas calls transient action the "perfection of the patient."[35] He means that when the action of the operator causes a new form or perfection that is extrinsic to the operator, that action can be called the perfection of the patient, since it is the patient that is receiving the new form that is being educed from potency to act. Thus the action in no way remains within the agent; hence it is not productive of an intrinsic perfection inhering in the agent.[36] Thus no change takes place in the agent when it exercises transient action. This is why, as we shall show in more detail later, transient action of itself involves no lessening of the agent's perfection. If the agent loses, it does so only *per accidens*—because it is a material agent with patible matter. It is in this sense that every action has its "reaction" in the world of material agents.

At times St. Thomas refers to transient action as *factio,* reserving the name *actio* for immanent activity. In one place, after distinguishing between immanent and transient activity, he remarks, "Prima igitur dictarium operationum, tamquam simplex operantis perfectio, *operationis* vindicat sibi nomen vel etiam *actionis;* secundo vero, eo quod sit perfectio facti, *factionis* nomen assumit."[37] Sometimes he reserves the name action for predicamental action and calls immanent action by the name of operation:

> Quod duplex est actio. Una quae procedit ab agente in rem exteriorem, quam transmutat; et haec est sicut illuminare; quae etiam proprie *actio* nominatur. Alia vero actio est, quae non procedit in rem exteriorem, sed

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[32] *CG,* II, 1.
[33] *De Pot.,* 3. 15.
[34] Cf. *De Pot.,* 10. 1.
[35] Cf. *CG,* I, 100. Also, *In IX Meta.,* lect. 8.
[36] Ferrara remarks that St. Thomas sometimes calls transient action the perfection of the thing made, *facti,* and sometimes the perfection of the patient, *patientis.* Now, comments Ferrara, both these designations are true, but in different ways. For the action is the perfection of the patient as the subject receiving the action and informed through it; it is the perfection of the thing made, if action be considered as formally distinct from the term of the action, and as the formal production of a form in some way, and hence as that through which is brought about the perfection of the work. But if action be taken as identical with the formal term of the action materially—thus also it is the perfection of the *facti,* as the new form is the perfection of the composite. *In II Contra Gentiles,* 1; No. 3, sec. 2.
[37] *CG,* II, 1.

stat in ipso ut perfectio ipsius; et haec proprie dicitur *operatio,* et haec est sicut lucere.[38]

But *operatio* and *factio* differ by species, though both may at times be called action.[39] This difference in species means that transient action is equated with predicamental action; immanent action, on the other hand, is reduced to the predicament of quality.

Predicamental action requires matter, that is, a material subject or recipient. For matter is compared to the agent as receiving the action that is from the agent; the act, which is the agent's as from it, is the patient's as in it. Therefore the agent requires matter that will receive the action of the agent; that is, transient action as a received perfection or act requires a receiving subject, which subject is matter existing under a previous form.[40] For predicamental action is based on motion, and motion requires a pre-existing subject. Thus it is that creation is not truly change or motion.[41] Further, any change in the created spiritual order would have to be instantaneous; if such a change involves time, it is only *per accidens*—in so far as there is some extrinsic dependence on material conditions.[42]

Transient action can be said to be really a medium between the

[38] *De Ver.,* 8. 6. He concludes in the same passage, "Sicut ergo corpus lucidum lucet quando est lux actu in ipso; ita intellectus intelligit omne illud quod est actu intelligible in eo." He says explicitly in several places that immanent action is proper only to living being. Therefore the text quoted above must not be interpreted as meaning that *lucere* is an immanent action. St. Thomas is only making use of an analogy. The distinction of *lucere* from *illuminare* was common in medieval philosophy and physics. According to Thomistic principles, however, *lucere* must of its nature be a transient action. On the other hand, *intelligere* is wholly in the agent and does not pass into an extrinsic thing.

[39] "Sed actio et factio differunt specie: nam factio est operatio, per quam aliquid fit in exteriori materia; sicut secare et urere; actio autem est operatio permanens in operante, et pertinens ad vitam ipsius." *In I Polit.,* lect. 2. Here we may note that there is no fixed precision of terms. For in this text *operatio* is taken for the genus, of which *actio* and *factio* are the species. Therefore, generally speaking, the terms must be interpreted according to the context, rather than according to any predetermined definitions.

[40] "Materia comparatur ad agens sicut recipiens actionem quae ab ipso est; actus enim, qui est agentis ut a quo, est patientis ut in quo. Igitur requiritur materia ab aliqua agente, ut recipiat actionem ipsius; ipsa enim actio agentis, in patiente recepta, est actus agentis." *CG,* II, 16.

[41] "Dicendum quod creatio non est mutatio nisi secundum modum intelligendi tantum. Nam de ratione mutationis est quod aliquid idem se habeat nunc et prius; nam quandoque est idem ens actualiter se habens nunc et prius, sicut in motibus secundum quantitatem et qualitatem; quandoque vero est idem ens in potentia tantum sicut in mutatione secundum substantiam, cuius subiectum est materia. Sed in creatione, per quam producitur tota substantia rerum, non potest accipi aliquid idem aliter se habens nunc et prius, nisi secundum intellectum tantum." *ST,* I, 45. 2 ad 2.

[42] Thus in the process of human judgment, because man's intellect is dependent on phantasms being presented, time is involved: "Et ex ea parte qua se ad phantasmata convertit compositioni et divisioni adiungitur tempus." *ST,* I, 85. 5 ad 2. Here is a further indication of why change in the spiritual order implies transient action in only an analogous sense.

agent and the subject receiving the action. On the other hand immanent action is not a medium between the agent and the object, for immanent action really in some way follows the union of the object with the agent.[43]

To act so as to produce an effect means that something by its own actuality is the cause that something distinct from itself is actuated. And the corresponding formality—*respondens formalitas*—is called action. To suffer is to receive motion, and in this is had passion.[44] Transient action presupposes in the agent to which it is attributed some act without which it would be impossible to produce motion and act in another.[45] Formally, transient action, as we have said, does not consist in any absolute perfection in the agent as such, but in the fact that the agent is the principle of motion in another, from which motion is derived the denomination and formality of agent.

### IMMANENT ACTION

In treating of transient action we have had occasion to speak of immanent action as well and to notice certain of its characteristics. We remarked that immanent action is not in the predicament of action but is rather a quality; it has an analogous rather than a univocal signification when compared with transient actions; immanent action does not of its very nature pre-suppose motion; it remains within the agent and is characteristic only of living things; it does not imply passion as a corresponding reality; at times immanent action is more properly called operation; and, finally, it is not a medium between the agent and object.

Perhaps it may seem that if the problem to be considered is really that of transient action, a treatment of immanent action is irrelevant. However such is not the case. In order to understand transient action, it is necessary to determine the meaning of action. To do so it is not only useful but necessary to consider immanent action, that we may be better prepared to discuss the meaning of transient activity and to see why it must—at least in its essential and complete reality—be in the patient.

Therefore we must determine why immanent action differs from transient action. The concept of *actus perfecti* can help us solve this. For if immanent action be considered only as differing from transient

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[43] "Actio quae transit in aliquod extrinsecum est realiter media inter agens et subiectum recipiens actionem. Sed actio quae manet in agente non est realiter medium inter agens et obiectum, sed secundum modum significandi tantum; realiter vero consequitur unionem obiecti cum agente. Ex hoc enim quod intellectum fit unum cum intelligente, consequitur intelligere quasi quidam effectus differens ab utroque." *ST*, I, 54. 1 ad 3.

[44] Mauri, *loc. cit.*

[45] "Quod duplex est actio . . . Hae autem duae actiones in hoc conveniunt quod utraque non progreditur nisi ab existente in actu, secundum quod est actu." *De Ver.*, 8. 6.

action in that the action is not passed into an exterior being but is rather the act of one part of a living being on another part of the same being—as is, indeed, true of certain immanent actions—then action of its very nature would imply imperfection and potency and hence in no sense could be predicated of God. But then if immanent action be the essential distinguishing mark of the living being, how could God be said to be living? Therefore in order to clear the way for a treatment of the problem of transient action, it will be useful to consider first the meaning of immanent action and why it is said to be the agent.

Immanent action is the action characteristic of living beings. Now the soul of man—the life principle—has five kinds of powers: vegetative, sentient, appetitive, locomotive, and intellectual.[46] Those things are properly said to be living that move themselves (either taking motion as it is the act of an imperfect being, or taking it in the sense of an act of an already perfected being).[47]

The operations of a living being may be of three orders: either 1) purely transient activity; or 2) activity that remains within the being but is accompanied with motion; or 3) immanent action that does not imply any reduction from potency to act but is the act of a being in act, this action not passing into an exterior being.

Immanent action is more properly called operation since it does not pass into an extrinsic nature or produce an extrinsic effect but remains in the operator.[48] When there is not something produced besides the action of the agent's power, the action is in the agent and is its perfection.[49] Since immanent operation has no exterior "product" as an end, it is considered as an end in itself.[50]

### IMMANENT ACTION—A QUALITY

Immanent action is classified as being of the order of quality, rather than being in the category of action. (This is true, of course, only when there is a real distinction in the being between its substance and its action; thus action in God is identified with His essence.)

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[46] Cf. *ST*, I, 78. 1.

[47] "Ex quo patet quod illa proprie sunt viventia, quae seipsa secundum aliquam speciem motus movent: sive accipiatur motus proprie, sicut motus dicitur actus imperfecti, idest existentis in potentia; sive motus accipiatur communiter, prout motus dicitur actus perfecti, prout intelligere et sentire dicitur moveri." *ST*, I, 18. 1.

[48] "Quaedam vero sunt quae in exteriorem materiam non transeunt ut effectum aliquem circa ipsam producant, ut patet in visione, quae cum sit actio videntis, nullum effectum in re visa efficit, et tales actiones, quae proprie operationes dicuntur, in ipsis operantibus tantum sunt." *In I Sent.*, d. 40, 1. 1 ad 1.

[49] "Quando non sit aliquod opus operatum praeter actionem potentiae, tunc actio existit in agente et ut perfectio eius, et non transit in aliquod exterius perficiendum." *In IX Meta.*, lect. 8. And this is in contradistinction to transient action, which is the perfection of the patient.

[50] Cf. *In I Ethicorum*, lect. 1.

For as we have noted, immanent action does not have the necessary elements for it to be classified as predicamental action, which presupposes motion, and the distinction of agent and patient, with action in the patient. This is the reason why Ferrara remarks that immanent action is not of the genus of *actio,* but of the genus of quality.[51]

Some philosophers would solve the problem of immanent action by simply stating that immanent action is received in the agent but not in the agent as such. They mean, perhaps, that one part of the being acts on another part. They would say that immanent action terminates in the agent and puts it in act, so that it acquires a new actuality that was previously lacking to it. And they seem to think that this is a satisfactory solution. But this is not indeed a completely satisfying answer to the problem. True, it will hold for certain immanent actions that border on the transient, such as the activities of vegetative life. But it will not be true of such actions as *intelligere,* which of its very nature implies no imperfection.

We will not examine all the immanent actions as to their mode of being acts of perfect or imperfect beings. But let us, for the sake of example, consider the vegetative powers: this type of action terminates in the agent but not in the agent as such. What does this mean? Does it not signify that a being—as *unum per se*—has a certain operation, so that one power as agent produces an act in some passive potency of the same being? But when St. Thomas speaks of *sentire, intelligere* and *velle* as being *actus perfecti,* he means something entirely different. Here we have immanent action in its fullest meaning. Granted that in order to sense or know there is required a reduction from potency to act in so far as man is concerned, this reduction is only *per accidens* attached to *intelligere* on account of the finite condition of man. (The case is slightly different when it comes to *sentire,* as will be shown later.) Rather, we understand *after* we are put in act—speaking in the order of primacy of nature, not of time—and hence it is only when we are in act that the real immanent operation, which is "to know," takes place. A careful analysis of the texts of St. Thomas will show this. There will be no attempt made to trace in every detail each of the operations most properly called immanent; nor will there be an examination of them according to their psychological sequence. Rather, the following discussion will outline the principles that are necessary for any complete understanding of the problem of action in general, and that of *actus perfecti* in particular.

### OPERATION AS AN END IN ITSELF

Operation does not always imply that it is for the production of

[51] "Actio enim immanens non est de genere *actionis,* sed de genere qualitatis." *In II Contra Gentiles,* 1; No. 4, sec. 2.

Mauri (*loc. cit.*) says that immanent action is reduced to the predicament of quality; it is in the same predicament as the active power.

something distinct from the operator. On the contrary, operation in its highest form is an end in itself. Thus, for man the end is to know and to love God; and in God himself operation reaches its highest perfection as expressed in the Blessed Trinity. The being of God is not static even though immutable. This is why it is more proper to speak of God as *Ipsum Esse* or *Ipsum Agere* rather than as *Ipsa Essentia.* This is the mystery of being. Act is more properly a verb; it is only a noun by a transferred meaning.[52] Hence St. Thomas remarks that Aristotle was correct in recognizing that happiness consists in perfect operation. The perfection of anything consists in its most perfect operation; for power and habit are perfected through operation. The more perfect genus of operation is that which remains within the agent.[53] The ultimate end of certain potencies is the use of the power and not that something be produced through the action of the power. For example, the ultimate end of the power of seeing is vision, or the act of seeing.[54] And it is in this manner that life is in the soul, if we take life for the works of life. In reality, of course, life is not an operation but is rather a *to be* in a nature to which immanent actions are proper.[55]

The first perfection of a thing is had through its form; the second, through the operation of the being. As the operation may be either an end in itself or the end may be something produced by the operation, we must determine which mode of operation is the higher. The answer is that the operation that is an end in itself is nobler, since it remains within the agent.[56] The other operation, since it is transient action, is the perfection of the thing made.

Hence each thing can be said to *be* in order to *act* or to operate.[57] Operation is sometimes called second act. This introduces the distinction of *actus primus* and *actus secundus.*

The form through which something is constituted in its species is called *actus primus;* operation, on the other hand, is *actus secundus.*[58]

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[52] St. Thomas asserts that the first meaning of *act* is taken from operation. Cf. *In IX Meta.,* lect. 8.

[53] "Perfectissimum autem in unoquoque est sua perfectissima operatio; nam potentia et habitus per operationem perficiuntur; unde Philosophus dicit, Felicitatem esse perfectam operationem." *CG,* I, 100.

[54] "Quia enim dixerat, quod opus est finis, posset aliquis credere, quod hoc esset verum in omnibus. Sed ipse hoc removet, dicens, quod quarumdam activarum potentiarum ultimus finis est solus usus potentiae, et non aliquid operatum per actionem potentiae; sicut ultimus finis potentiae visivae est visio, et praeter eam non fit a potentia visiva aliquod opus operatum." *In IX Meta.,* lect. 8.

[55] *ST,* I, 18. 2, where the reason why life is sometimes taken for operation is demonstrated.

[56] Cf. *In I Ethicorum,* lect. 1.

[57] "Omnis enim res propter suam operationem esse videtur; operatio enim est ultima perfectio rei . . ." *CG,* III, 113. "Manifestum est autem quod operatio est ultimus actus operantis." *ST,* I-II, 3. 2.

[58] Cf. *CG,* IV, 59.

Thus act is twofold: the first, which is the form; and the second, which is operation.[59] The effect of the form is *esse,* for all things have their *to be* according to their form. As each thing is in act by its own form, its operation follows its form. The degree of power for operating is according to the degree of the perfection of the nature that acts.[60]

### ACTIVE AND PASSIVE POTENCY

As action is twofold, so also is *potentia:* active potency, or power, which corresponds to the act that is operation (and from this, St. Thomas says, the first imposition of the word *potentia* seems to have been taken); the other is passive potency, to which corresponds first act, which is form.[61]

It is important to recall that in creatures the *to act—agere*—must be distinct from the substance. Thus active potency has the role of an accidental power, which power is completed by the *to act.* Because a finite being is not its own *to be,* it cannot be its own *to act;* act follows being, since anything acts only in so far as it is in act. If the *to act* were not distinct from the potency nor the potency from the substance, it would follow that the creature would be pure act; for every potency would be actualized, and hence the subject of the potency would necessarily be pure act. As the creature's *to act* must be in the accidental order, it requires an accidental potency that is distinct from the substance, for act and potency must be in the same genus.[62] This operative power—active potency—before it is put in act in the order of operation is only *actus imperfectus.* To the *actus perfectus* (that is, *esse*) and to that which is *agere,* must correspond the potencies of *essentia* and *activa potentia;* the former is a potency to being, the latter to action. But if operative potency is a certain accidental form or act, how can it inhere in the substance? Why does it not require a further accidental potency, and so on *ad infinitum?* The answer is that the principle that act and potency must be in the same genus is universally true of *actus intrinsecus perfectus* and its

[59] Cf. *De Malo,* 1. 5; *In II de Caelo et Mundo,* 4; *ST,* I, 48. 5; *ST,* I, 76. 4 ad 1.

[60] "Primus autem effectus formae est esse, nam omnis res habet esse secundum suam formam. Secundus autem effectus est operatio, nam omne agens agit per suam formam . . . secundum operationem vero, inquantum ea quae sunt perfectioris naturae, sunt magis potentia ad agendum." *ST,* I, 42. 1 ad 1.

[61] Cf. *De Pot.,* 1. 1.

[62] "Actio enim est proprie actualitas virtutis; sicut esse est actualitas substantiae vel essentiae. Impossible est autem quod aliquid quod non est purus actus, sed aliquid habet de potentia admixtum, sit sua actualitas, quia actualitas potentialitati repugnat. Solus autem Deus est actus purus. Unde in solo Deo sua substantia est suum esse et suum agere." *ST,* I, 54. 1.

"Primo, quia cum potentia et actus dividant ens et quodlibet genus entis, oportet quod ad idem genus referatur potentia et actus. Et ideo si actus non est in genere substantiae, potentia quae dicitur ad illum actum, non potest esse in genere substantiae." *ST,* I, 77. 1.

potency but not of an imperfect act and its corresponding potency.[63]

Every active potency follows the actuality and entity of that of which it is. For each thing acts so as to produce its like: "Omnis activa potentia consequitur actualitatem et entitatem eius cuius est. Unumquodque autem agens est natum agere sibi *simile*."[64] Thus a creature acts through its own form but only through the medium of an active potency;[65] that is, the form is the remote principle and the power is the proximate principle of the action. The principle of activity is that by which a thing acts. This is the definition of potency or power. Either this power is the agent's essence—as in the case with God—or it is some accidental medium between the essence and the action.[66] Whereas the passive potency of an existing being is on the part of the matter, active potency flows from the form.[67] Nothing is able to act except through an active potency existing in it.[68] Each thing in so far as it is in act is the principle of activity.[69] Thus active potency follows the act of a thing. But it is the subject of the operative potency that is really said to be able to act: ". . . illud est subiectum operativae potentiae quod est potens operari; omne enim accidens denominat proprium subiectum. Idem autem est quod potest operari, et quod operatur."[70] Hence the active potency is a certain form by which the agent applies itself to acting, although it is the agent itself that acts through this form.[71]

### TWO KINDS OF ACTIVE POTENCY

But a distinction can be made in regard to *potentia activa*. There is one kind of active potency that corresponds to the transient action that is its result; but there is another species of active potency: *potentia operativa*. This latter is only possessed by beings that are capable of immanent activity.[72]

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[63] Cf. A. Rozwadowski, S.J., "Distinctio Potentiarum a Substantiae secundum Doctrinam Sancti Thomae," *Gregorianum*, XVI (1935), 272-81.

[64] *De Pot.*, 1. 3.

[65] "Potentia autem activa cuiuslibet rei sequitur formam ipsius, quae est principium agendi. Forma autem vel est ipsa natura rei, sicut in simplicibus; vel est constituens ipsam rei naturam, in his scilicet quae sunt composita ex materia et forma. Unde manifestum est quod potentia activa cuiuslibet rei consequitur naturam ipsius." *ST*, III, 13. 1.

[66] "Omne illud quod est principium actionis, ut quo agitur, habet potentiae rationem; sive sit essentia, sive aliquod accidens medium, puta qualitas quaedam inter essentiam et actionem." *De Pot.*, 2. 1 ad 6.

[67] Cf. *De Pot.*, 5. 4 ad 1 and *ST*, I-II, 55. 2.

[68] Nihil est potens agere nisi per potentiam activam in ipso existentem, . . . nihil potens est pati nisi per potentiam passivam quae est in ipso." *CG*, II, 60.

[69] Cf. *ST*, I, 25. 1.

[70] *ST*, I, 77. 5.

[71] "Principium actionis . . . [est] forma eius quod ab agente applicatur ad agendum; quamvis et ipsum agens per formam suam agat." *ST*, I, 105. 5. Hence it is said that action is always predicated of the supposit or individual. Cf. *ST*, III, 7. 13.

Active potency in the former sense may be defined as the principle of acting on another inasmuch as it is other.[73] That is, it is the principle of some motion, which motion is in a thing other than the agent. The potency that is the principle of motion in the subject being moved is properly called passive potency.[74] If the species of active potency that we are considering here be said to be in the mobile or patient—as when a thing moves itself—it is not in the mobile as patient; but it is in it as agent, in so far as one part as agent acts on another part of the same being, which second part is in potency. Therefore the thing is not agent and patient in the same respect but is so by different parts.[75] Since the action of this type of active potency is transient, the object and end of this potency is the thing made or produced.[76] Now as all transient activity involves some motion, this potency implies acting through motion; and hence it is most properly a power of a material thing, for it has the activity characteristic of material things: motion and transient action.[77] If this active potency is not in complete act, it must be put in act by something that is in act. When it is reduced to act, it produces its action in the effect. For *to act* is precisely to exercise some action. Hence *to act* does not consist precisely in the action. It could not indeed, for the act that is the *complementum* of the potency—that is, the act that puts the potency in act so that it can act—must be intrinsic to it. But the action, since it is transient, is in the patient. Therefore the *to act* is somehow in the agent.

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[72] "Activa autem potentia duplex est: quaedam quidem actio terminatur ad aliquid actum extra . . .; quaedam vero est cuius actio non terminatur ad extra, sed consistit in ipso agente, ut visio in vidente." *De Ver.*, 14. 3.

[73] "Potentia enim activa est principium agendi in aliud, secundum quod est aliud." *CG*, II, 7.

[74] "Potentia igitur, secundum quod est principium motus in eo in quo est, non comprehenditur sub potentia activa, sed magis sub passiva." *In V Meta.*, lect. 14.

[75] Cf. *In IX Meta.*, lect 1: ". . . possibile est quod principium activum simul sit in ipso mobili vel passo, sicut cum aliquid movet seipsum; non tamen secundum idem est movens et motum, agens et patiens. Et ideo dicitur quod principium quod dicitur potentia activa, est principium transmutationis in alio inquantum est aliud: quia etsi contingit principium activum esse in eodem cum passo, non tamen secundum quod est idem, sed secundum quod est aliud."

[76] "Potentiae activae obiectum et effectus est ens factum." *CG*, II, 25.

[77] Here transient action is considered as it implies motion. In this sense it is the action most characteristic of beings composed of matter and form, for it is proper to material things that they act on each other. However, we must recall that even a purely spiritual agent can exercise transient action. Thus an angel can move a body locally by application of its power: "applicationem virtutis." Cf. *ST*, I, 52 and 53; *ST*, I, 75. 1 ad 3. Yet an agent such as this is capable of other actions also. However, since a non-living being can exercise only transient action, it possesses only the kind of active potency we are considering above. This is why this type of active power may be said to be most proper to a material thing, particularly one that lacks the perfection of life.

But there is another type of active potency, which may be more properly called *potentia operativa.* Thus the soul possesses certain operative faculties.[78] The operations of the soul are compared to the soul as second act to first act.[79] The act to which the operative potency is compared is operation: "In omni autem creato essentia differt a suo esse et comparatur ad ipsum sicut potentia ad actum. Actus autem ad quem comparatur potentia operativa est operatio."[80] Hence, for example, as the creature is not its own *intelligere,* neither is it its own *potentia intellectiva.* This intellectual power is an illustration of an active potency that implies immanent operation as its act. In this instance, the act of the potency—that is, the act by which it is put in act—is followed by an action that is intrinsic to the being. This is the key to the meaning of *actus perfecti.* I will attempt to demonstrate this later.

This operative potency is, in some way, in proportion to the degree of immateriality of the being in which it is.

Before considering *actus perfecti,* we must make one more distinction.

### PERFECT AND IMPERFECT ACT

*Actus perfectus* is simply *act.* That is, by the term "perfect act" is denoted an act that is not specified by a further act to which it is ordered as a potency. The potency that corresponds to this act is ordered to it as act, that is, it is not ordered to anything further. *Actus imperfectus,* on the other hand, is completed by some act to which it is in potency, as an operative potency is specified and completed by operation. An imperfect act is an act in so far as it is an accidental perfection of the substance in which it inheres; but it is a potency in regard to the act of operation.[81] The potency that receives

[78] "Et ideo operationes animae se habent ad perfectiones acquisitas, non solum per modum dispositionis; sed sicut principia activa." *In I Sent.,* d. 17, 1. 3.

[79] "Operationes enim vitae comparantur ad animam ut actus secundi ad primum." *CG,* II, 60.

[80] *ST,* I, 54. 3.

[81] This is the explanation offered by Rozwadowski: "Ut apparet ex exemplis, quae afferuntur, per actum perfectum S. Thomas intelligit talem qui non specificatur ab alio actu intrinseco superioris ordinis a quo completur, e contrario actum imperfectum vocat illum, qui specificatur et completur ab alio actu intrinseco superioris ordinis ad quem est in potentia, sic v. g. habitus est actus imperfectus, quia specificatur et completur ab actu intrinseco operationis. Et recte quidem, nam si actus non specificatur ab alio actu intrinseco superioris ordinis, tunc actus secundum suam essentiam seu speciem est simpliciter actus et non potentia; e contrario si specificatur ab actu intrinseco superioris ordinis ad quem est in potentia, tunc eiusmodi secundum suam essentiam simpliciter non est actus, sed potentia et solum secundum quid potest dici actus, nam constituitur in sua specie non ut actus, sed ut potentia ad actum superioris ordinis." *Op. cit.,* pp. 275-76.

"Sed potentia operativa, necesse est, ut specificetur ab operatione, nam operatio est actus formalis perfectus, et potentia, quae immediate specificatur

an *actus imperfectus*—as, for example, the soul is the subject of its operative powers—does not regard it as act but rather as a potency ordained to a further act: *potentia ad actus superioris ordinis.* Since this act does not determine or specify the potency into which it is received, it is not necessarily in the same genus with that potency. Thus it is that active potency can be in the genus of accident and yet directly inhere in a substance.[82]

Motion, too, is called an *actus imperfectus* in the sense that it is by means of motion that the subject is realizing a perfection not yet fully possessed. The motion terminates in the complete and perfect act to which the potency was ordered. If motion were a perfect act, it would be the term of motion and not motion. "Oportet quod motus sit actus imperfectus."[83] In these two kinds of "imperfect act" there is implied a certain degree of actuality that is ordered necessarily to a further and more perfect act: in one case the act is that of an operative power; in the other, that of the term or new form produced through the motion.

Thus motion is an *actus imperfectus,* and an action such as *intelligere* is an *actus perfectus.* But when St. Thomas asserts that motion is an *actus imperfecti,* and that *intelligere* is an *actus perfecti,* he is making more than a mere distinction between perfect and imperfect act, as will later be demonstrated.

To illustrate the distinction of perfect and imperfect act in its application to operative potencies, let us note the following text:

> Sciendum tamen est quod in naturalibus rebus aliquid praeexistit in potentia dupliciter. Uno modo in potentia activa completa: quando, scilicet, principium intrinsecum sufficienter potest perducere in actum perfectum. . . . Alio modo in potentia passiva; quando, scilicet, principium intrinsecum non sufficit ad educendum in actum; . . . Quando igitur praeexistit aliquid in potentia activa completa, tunc agens extrinsecum non agit nisi adiuvando agens intrinsecum, et ministrando ei ea quibus possit in actum exire; sicut medicus in sanatione est minister naturae, quae principaliter operatur, confortando naturam, et apponendo medicinas. . . . Quando vero aliquid praeexistat in potentia passiva tantum, tunc agens extrinsecum est quod educit principaliter de potentia in actum. . . . Scientia ergo praeexistat in addiscente in potentia non pure passiva, sed activa; alias homo non possit per se ipsum acquirere scientiam.[84]

Here active and passive potency are distinguished. When active potency is said to be existing *completa,* it is meant that the power lies completely within the agent, not that the power is necessarily in complete act. The text shows that certain conditions—*adiuvando et min-*

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ab illo, unde potentia operativa necessario est actus *imperfectus,* seu secundum quid, simpliciter vero non est actus, sed potentia in ipso ordine essentiae . . ." *Ibid.,* p. 280.

[82] *Ibid.,* pp. 278-79.

[83] *In XI Meta.,* lect. 9, 2305. Cf. *In I Sent.,* d. 19, 2. 1.

[84] *De Ver.,* 11. 1.

*istrando*—on the part of extrinsic things are necessary in order to reduce the active potency to act.

Another illustration of this medium, which is "imperfect act," is that of the retention of intelligible species:

> Dicendum quod species intelligibiles aliquando sunt in intellectu in potentia tantum, et tunc dicitur intellectus esse in potentia. Aliquando autem secundum ultimam completionem actus, et tunc intelligit actu. Aliquando medio modo se habet inter potentiam et actum et tunc dicitur esse intellectus in habitu. Et secundum hunc modum intellectus conservat species, etiam quando actu non intelligit.[85]

The power of understanding in man is not purely passive. Although his possible intellect be in potency, man has the *virtus* of the agent intellect.[86]

### TEXTS ON *ACTUS PERFECTI*

#### *Commentary on the Sentences*

The texts in which St. Thomas mentions *actus perfecti* will be presented in their chronological order. This is a method that has been suggested for any analysis of Thomistic texts; and it is particularly applicable here, since the texts are of such a uniform nature as to permit their being grouped according to the probable order in which they were written.

The first reference to *actus perfecti* is in the commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*.[87] St. Thomas asserts that though certain actions pass into exterior matter, some actions do not pass into exterior things but remain in the operator. And the latter operations do not infer passion, except inasmuch as the agent may happen to be in potency; that is, they do not imply a patient distinct from the operator as recipient of the action. St. Thomas applies this distinction to predestination as being something in God but not something in the creature.[88] If in these operations that are not signified as going into some

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[85] *ST*, I, 79. 6 ad 3.

[86] "Nulla autem actio convenit alicui rei, nisi per aliquod principium formaliter ei inhaerens . . . Ergo oportet virtutem quae est principium huius actionis, esse aliquid in anima." *ST*, I, 74. 4. And, it may be noted: "Dicendum quod cum dicitur quod intellectus agens est sua actio, est praedicatio non per essentiam, sed per concomitantiam, quia cum sit in actu eius substantia, statim, quantum est in se, concomitatur ipsam actio. Quod non est de intellectu possibili, qui non habet actiones nisi postquam fuerit factus in actu." *ST*, I, 54. 1 ad 1.

[87] The texts I use are the only ones I was able to discover. The list is not necessarily exhaustive.

[88] This is the heart of the text: "Operatio enim agentis quaedam est ut transiens in effectum, et haec proprie actio vel passio dicitur: et tali actioni semper respondet e converso passio; unde invenitur calefactio actio et calefactio passio, et similiter creatio actio et creatio passio. Quaedam vero operatio est quae non significatur ut procedens in aliquem effectum, sed magis secundum quod est aliquid in ipso; et si quidem haec recipiatur in ipso, illa receptio dicetur passio; et actio consequens coniunctum ex recepto et recipiente dicitur operatio: ***quia operatio semper est perfecti,***

effect but as staying in the agent there is required *per accidens* some reception on the part of the agent, then this reception is a *passio*. But the *action* follows the agent's being put in act; that is, it follows the conjunct of the thing received and the receiver. In this way operation is always the act of a perfect thing: that is, the action of a being already in act, whether that being had to be reduced from potency to act—as in the case of creatures—or in Pure Act, God. Thus *to sense* is a certain operation that does not pass into an exterior thing but rather follows the sensible species that are in the one sensing. As *to sense* requires a certain reception of the sensible species, it implies a preceding *passio*. Thus also *intelligere* may, in some cases, require a preceding *pati*. But the action which follows the perfection of the sense through the species is called operation—which may be analogously referred to as a *motus sensus*—and it is an act of a perfect thing, of a thing in act. As God requires no reception of species, there is no passion in him, only operation. Hence the operations that are *actus perfecti* do not necessarily imply a corresponding passion. Unlike transient action, they do not require that there be some reception or potency. This text that we have just analyzed is important, for it gives us a comparatively detailed explanation of *actus perfecti*.

The next reference is in the fourth book of the *Sentences*.[89] Here St. Thomas gives the distinction that he uses in most of his references

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ut patet in sensu: sentire enim est quaedam operatio sentientis, nec procedens in effectum aliquem circa sensibile, sed magis secundum quod species sensibilis in ipso est; unde sentire quantum ad ipsum receptionem speciei sensibilis nominat passionem, similiter et intelligere quod etiam pati quoddam est, ut in 3 De Anima (text. 2) dicitur: sed quantum ad actum consequentem ipsum sensum perfectum per speciem nominat operationem, quae dicitur motus sensus, de quo dicit Philosophus (in 3 De Anima, text. 11) quod est *actus perfecti*. Sed in Deo similitudo rei cognitae, non per receptionem, sed per essentiam suam; unde suum intelligere nullo modo dicit passionem, sed operationem tantum. Omnes igitur tales operationes non habent passiones respondentes, nisi per modum significandi tantum; sicut cum dicitur aliquid sciri, non ponitur aliqua passio secundum rem in scito, sed solum quidam respectus ad scientem secundum rationem, qui per modum passionis significatur a grammatico, sicut et operatio per modum actionis; unde dicit quod scire est activum, et sciri passivum." *In I Sent.*, d. 40, 1. 1 ad 1.

[89] "Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod motus dupliciter dicitur, ut patet in 3 De Anima (text. com. 28). Est enim quidam motus qui est actus imperfecti, qui est exitus de potentia in actum; et talis oportet quod sit successivus, quia semper expectat aliquid in futurum ad perfectionem suae speciei, eo quod pars motus est alterius speciei a toto motu, ut dicitur in 10 *Ethic.* (cap. 2 vel 4): sicut patet in alteratione de motu qui est ad albedinem, cuius pars est motus ad medium colore specie differens, si divisim accipiatur. Alius motus est *actus perfecti*, qui magis operatio dicitur, qui non expectat aliquid in futurum ad complementum suae speciei, sicut sentire; et talis motus non est successivus, sed subitus; et si contingat quod talis motus sit in tempore, hoc erit per accidens, quia mensuratur in quolibet instanti illius temporis in quo dicitur esse; sicut esse hominem, in tempore est et in instanti; et talis motus est motus liberi arbitrii, de quo loquimur; et ideo est in instanti. Secus autem esset, si esset motus collativus; quia tunc non posset esse in instanti, propter discursum de uno in aliud." *In IV Sent.*, d. 17, 1. 5. sol. 3 ad 1.

of *actus perfecti:* the meaning of motion properly speaking, and the use of the term as extended to higher operations. Motion is the act of an imperfect thing, that is, of a subject that is in the process of going from potency to act; hence it always expects something in the future for the perfection of its species. But it is another kind of motion that is the act of a perfect thing, which action is more properly called operation. This "motion" does not expect something in the future for the completion of its species; if such motion be in time, it is only so *per accidens*. A pertinent example is that of man's free will, which is in time only *per accidens*.

This particular text is a confirmation of what was said above, namely, that the motion that is an *actus imperfecti* is an imperfect act, and that an *actus perfecti* is a perfect act. When we say that motion is an *actus imperfecti,* we are considering motion from the side of the subject that is being moved rather than motion as such. That is, we are defining motion as it is the act of an imperfect subject, a being in potency. On the other hand, when we assert that motion is an *actus imperfectus,* we are considering motion as such, as it is a certain medium between pure potency and complete act. Thus, too, when we affirm that an action that is an *actus perfecti* is also an *actus perfectus,* we are referring to the fact that it is a complete act with an *esse perfectum,* not an *esse fluens*. But when we declare that this action is an *actus perfecti,* we are considering it as it is an action that remains in the agent producing it. And this agent, since it is in act when it produces the action, is a being in perfect act and not a being in imperfect act, as is the subject of motion.

### *Summa contra Gentiles*

The next mention of *actus perfecti* is in the second book of the *Summa contra Gentiles,* Chapter 82. St. Thomas discusses Plato's view that the soul moves itself. Plato concludes that the soul moves itself. Now this is false, St. Thomas says, because anything that is moved *per se* must be a body, and the soul is not a body. Further, as a thing is a mover in so far as it is in act and is moved only in so far as it is in potency, it is impossible that the same thing be mover and moved in the same respect. But Plato does not teach that the soul is a body.[90] Hence he is not using the word *motion* in its strict sense but as it can be applied to any operation. Thus, in a way, *to sense* and *to understand* are "motions." But they are the acts of a

[90] "Sed quia Plato animam non ponebat esse corpus, licet uteretur nomine motus qui proprie corporum est, non tamen hoc de motu proprie dicto intelligebat sed accipiebat motum communius pro qualibet operatione, prout etiam Aristoteles dicit (*De Anim.* 3) quod sentire et intelligere sunt motus quidam; sic autem motus non est actus existentis in potentia sed actus perfecti. Unde cum dicebat animam movere seipsam intendebat per hoc dicere quod ipsa operatur absque adminiculo corporis, ex contrario ei quod accidit in aliis formis quae non agunt absque materia." *CG,* II, 82.

thing in perfect act, not of a thing existing in potency. When Plato says that the soul moves itself, he means that the soul has an operation that is without any admixture of the body. Forms that are completely immersed in matter cannot exercise this kind of action. In this reference we find a repetition of the analogous use of motion. And, it is well to note, there is some indication that *actus perfecti* is most proper to things that are independent of matter. This is a confirmation of what we said above concerning the relation between *actus perfecti* and the immateriality of the agent.

### *Some Opuscula*

In the *De Potentia,* St. Thomas makes the familiar distinction between what in later terminology is called immanent action and transient action. Immanent action is the perfection of the operator; an example is *intelligere.* For the intellect is not perfect unless it is understanding in act. Immanent operation is proper only to living beings. This kind of action may be called motion in the sense that motion can be used to designate the action of a perfect thing. In this way living things can be said to move themselves, even when it is a matter of the higher immanent activities.[91]

More or less the same thought is repeated in the commentary on Dionysius's *Book of the Divine Names.*[92] Motion is twofold: the act of a perfect thing, and the act of an imperfect thing, that is, a thing existing in potency to the act. The latter motion is proper to corporeal things that can be moved according to substance, quantity, quality, or place; they are moved in so far as they go from potency to act. But the motion that is the act of a perfect or perfected being is the operation of a thing already in act; and this operation remains in the agent. Such are *to sense, to understand,* and *to will.*

(It is important to note that this *actus perfecti* is an action or operation that remains in the agent. A transient action, if it be viewed from the side of the agent, is, in a sense, an act of a thing in perfect act; for the agent in order to act must already be in complete act. But as transient action is in the patient, this action lacks the formality of

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[91] ". . . secundum operationum genus est proprium viventium; unde si largo modo accipiamus motum pro qualibet operatione, sicut Philosophus accipit in 3 De Anima, ubi dicitur, quod sentire et intelligere sunt motus quidam, non quidem motus qui est actus imperfecti, ut definitur 3 Phys., sed motus qui est actus perfecti, sic proprium videtur esse viventis, et in hoc ratio videtur consistere quod aliquid sit movens seipsum." *De Pot.,* 10. 1.

[92] "Considerandum est autem, quod, sicut dicit Philosophus in 3 De Anima, duplex est motus. Unus qui est actus imperfecti, idest existentis in potentia; et talis est motus rerum corporalium, quae secundum hoc moveri dicuntur sive secundum substantiam, sive secundum quantitatem, sive secundum qualitatem sive secundum locum, inquantum exeunt de potentia in actum. Alius est motus perfecti, secundum quod ipsa operatio existentis in actu manens in ipso operante, motus dicitur, ut sentire, intelligere et velle." *In Lib. de Div. Nom.,* IV, 7.

the immanent actions, which are *actus perfecti,* since they remain in the agent as agent.)

*Commentaries on Aristotle*

In the commentary on the *Physics,* St. Thomas repeats that the soul or any spiritual substance can be said to move itself by understanding or loving.[93] In the commentary on the *De Anima* he analyzes *sentire* as an act of a perfected being. After showing how the sensible puts the sense in act--not by motion from contrary to contrary, but only by reducing it from potency to act—St. Thomas asserts that motion in corporeal things is from contrary to contrary. But *to sense,* if it be called motion, is of a different species. For motion is properly the act of a thing existing in potency, because the thing that is receding from one contrary has not yet attained the other contrary but is in potency to it. And as anything that is in potency is imperfect in so far as it is in potency, motion is the act of an imperfect thing. But the "motion" of sense is the operation of a power already put in act through the sensible species; for *to sense* does not belong to the sensitive power except in so far as that power is in act.[94] As the reduction of sense from potency to act is only improperly *passio,* so also the *motion* of sense is not motion proper, for it is the action of the sense reduced to act by the sensible species. Thus the immanent operation that is the act of a thing in act does not of its nature presuppose any "perfecting." Such reduction from potency to act is characteristic only of creatures that are in potency and hence need to be put in act before they can act.

Likewise, *to understand* is only analogously called motion. For it is the act of a perfect thing and is an action remaining in the agent itself. That an intellect be perfected or reduced from potency to act is not required by the very nature of an intellect as such. If such a "perfecting" is necessary, it is due to the fact that the intellect is a finite intellect and is only in potency to the intelligible species by

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[93] ". . . movere seipsum est tantum modo substantiae spiritualis, quae intelligit seipsam, et amat seipsam (universaliter omnes operationes motus appellando): quia et huiusmodi operationes, scilicet sentire et intelligere, etiam Aristoteles, in tertia De Anima, nominat motum secundum quod motus est actus perfecti." *In VII Physic.,* lect. 1.

[94] "Et quia motus, qui est in rebus corporalibus, de quo determinatum est in libro Physicorum, est de contrario in contrarium, manifestum est, quod sentire, si dicatur motus, est alia species motus ab ea de qua determinatum est in libro Physicorum: ille enim motus est actus existentis in potentia, quia videlicet recedens ab uno contrario, quamdiu movetur non attingit alterum contrarium, quod est terminus motus, sed est in potentia. Et quia omne, quod est in potentia, inquantum huiusmodi, est imperfectus, ideo ille motus est actus imperfecti. Sed iste motus est actus perfecti: est enim operatio sensus, iam facti in actu, per suam speciem. Non enim sentire convenit sensui nisi in actu existenti; et ideo iste motus simpliciter est aliter a motu physico et huiusmodi motus dicitur proprie operatio, ut sentire, et intelligere et velle." *In III De An.,* lect. 12.

which it must be perfected. As God is in no way in potency, he is his own perfection and hence his own *intelligere*.[95]

In another place St. Thomas distinguishes the two ways in which living beings may be said to move themselves.[96] They move either according to motion proper or by motion that is *actus perfecti*. Locomotion or vegetative power is an example of the first kind: for both of these require that one part move another or put another in act. Hence not all immanent actions are *actus perfecti*, but only those that approach the immaterial.

But why use the same word—motion—for two kinds of actions that are essentially different? St. Thomas answers that as motion proper is the act of the mobile, so *actus perfecti*, inasmuch as it is an act of the operator, is called the operator's *motion* because of this similitude: as motion is the act of the thing moved, so this action is the act of the thing moved and of the agent as well.[97]

St. Thomas points out that the action of a power that is intrinsic to the agent is properly an act of a thing in act.[98] As this kind of action does not imply succession, it is not of itself in time.[99] There are two more references to *actus perfecti* in the *Summa Theologica*. The first states that contemplation is an act of a perfect being; the second repeats the fact that there is a dual use for the word *motion*.[100]

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[95] "Non enim intelligere est motus qui est actus imperfecti qui est ab alio in aliud, sed actus perfecti existens in ipso agente. Similiter etiam quod intellectus perficiatur ab intelligibili vel assimiletur ei, hoc convenit intellectui qui quandoque est in potentia, quia per hoc quod est in potentia, differt ab intelligibili et assimilatur ei per speciem intelligibilem, quae est similitudo rei intellectae, et perficitur per ipsam sicut potentia per actum. Sed intellectus divinus quia nullo modo est in potentia, non perficitur per intelligibile neque assimilatur ei, sed est sua perfectio et suum intelligere." *ST*, I, 14. 2 ad 2.

[96] "Ex quo patet quod illa proprie sunt viventia, quae seipsa secundum aliquam speciem motu movent; sive accipiatur motus proprie, sicut motus dicitur actus imperfecti, idest existentis in potentia; sive motus accipiatur communiter, prout motus dicitur actus perfecti, prout intelligere et sentire dicitur moveri." *ST*, I, 18. 1.

[97] "Unde quia motus est actus mobilis, secunda actio, inquantum est actus operantis, dicitur motus eius, ex hac similitudine; quod sicut motus est actus mobilis, ita huiusmodi actio est actus agentis; licet motus sit actus imperfecti, scilicet existentis in potentia, huiusmodi autem actio est actus perfecti, idest existentis in actu, ut dicitur in III De Anima." *ST*, I, 18. 3 ad 1.

[98] ". . . motus existentis in potentia est actus imperfecti. Sed motus qui est secundum applicationem virtutis, est existentis in actu, quia virtus rei est secundum quod actu est." *ST*, I, 53. 1 ad 2. Cf. also: ". . . secundum quod est actus perfecti . . . intelligere et sentire dicuntur motus." *ST*, I, 58. 1 ad 1.

[99] "Motus dupliciter dicitur; uno modo, qui est actus imperfecti, scilicet existentis in potentia, inquantum huiusmodi; et talis motus est successivus et in tempore. Alius autem motus est *actus perfecti*, idest, existentis in actu, sicut intelligere, sentire, velle, et huiusmodi, et etiam delectari; et huiusmodi non est successivus, nec per se in tempore." *ST*, I-II, 31. 2 ad 1.

[100] "Contemplari est quidem motus intellectus, prout quaelibet operatio dicitur motus; secundum quod dicit Philosophus in 3 De Anima, quod sentire et intelligere sunt motus quidam, prout motus dicitur actus perfecti." *ST*, II-II, 179. 1 ad 3. Cf. also *ST*, II-II, 180. 6c.

*Later Texts*

There are some other texts in St. Thomas's works that can serve as an aid in interpreting *actus perfecti.* We will briefly mention a few of these.

That *to know* is an act of a being in act is clearly shown by this passage: "Sed intelligens et intellectum, prout ex eis est effectum unum quid, quod est intellectus in actu, sunt unum principium huius actus qui est intelligere."[101] The intellect, when in some way joined with the thing to be known through the medium of the species, is the principle of the action *intelligere.* Thus to *understand* is not the "perfecting" of the intellect in the order of formal perfection, but is rather the effect of the intellect already perfected by the intelligible species. Thus the intellect's reduction from potency to act is previous to the act of knowing.[102]

When it is affirmed that this action or operation is the proper actuality of the power, we should not interpret this as meaning that this action is the act that puts the operative power in complete act. What is meant is that it is proper to the nature of a power to act when it is put in act. Hence the action follows the power's being in act.[103]

The act of a perfect being that is *intelligere* has this function: it produces the *verbum,* in which the thing is known.[104] But from what potency does it produce this? We can only posit the question here. Perhaps the answer is partially indicated in the fact that the *verbum* is not a thing produced in the sense that it is a thing separate from the knower. (We are, of course, speaking of the order of human cognition.) For it does not pass into an exterior thing.[105] And, as we have seen, action as such does not necessarily imply a corresponding potency. In any case, if we do not know the *how,* at least we know the *why* of the *verbum.* It is necessary to produce the *verbum* as a medium in which the exterior thing is known, when direct union is an impossibility.

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"Motus . . . dupliciter dicitur: uno modo proprie, secundum quod importat exitum de potentia in actu, prout est actus imperfecti . . . alio modo dicitur motus, qui est actus perfecti, idest, existentis in actu, sicut intelligere et sentire dicuntur quidam motus." *ST,* III, 21. 1 ad 3.

[101] *De Ver.,* 8. 6.

[102] "Intelligens non se habet ut agens vel ut patiens, nisi per accidens; inquantum scilicet ad hoc quod intelligibile uniatur intellectui; requiritur actio vel passio; . . . passio autem secundum quod intellectus possibilis recipit species intelligibiles et sensus species sensibiles. Sed hoc quod est intelligere, consequuntur ad hanc passionem . . ., sicut effectus ad causam." *Ibid.*

[103] Cf. *ST,* I, 54. 1 ad 3 and 56. 1c; *De Pot.,* 8. 1.

[104] "[Conceptio] . . . differt autem ab actione intellectus: quia praedicta conceptio consideratur ut terminus actionis, et quasi quoddam per ipsam constitutum. Intellectus enim sua actione format rei definitionem. Haec autem conceptio intellectus in nobis proprie verbum dicitur." *De Pot.,* 8. 1.

[105] "Humanum verbum est in intellectu loquentis, non distans ab eo." *De Pot.,* 10. 1.

*Ferrara's Commentary*

Before proposing a solution to the meaning of *actus perfecti,* let us consider how Ferrara interprets it.[106] He outlines two possible ways of interpreting this proposition: "Operatio est motus qui non est actus existentis in potentia, sed actus perfecti." Either we may assert that in the two statements "operator to be moved" and a "body to be moved", the "to be moved" is taken equivocally, as "motion" is. For the "body to be moved" is the very subject of the motion; but the "operator to be moved" is not itself the subject of the operation but is the operator that produces the operation. Thus in this sense, motion, properly speaking, does not belong to the subject in so far as that subject has a form and is perfect, but pertains to it only in so far as it is in potency to some form that it does not have, and to which it tends through motion. On the other hand, operation belongs to the operator as agent, not in so far as it is in potency to it, but in so far as it is in act and perfected through a form; for each thing operates according as it is in act through a form, not inasmuch as it lacks form.

The second sense, Ferrara continues, is that motion properly speaking is an imperfect act and leaves the mobile in potency to further act; hence such an act is not the completion of the subject that is being moved but is only the way to that completion. Yet operation is an *actus perfectus,* that is, the completion or perfection of the operator, and does not leave the operator, as such, in potency to further act, nor is it a way to further actuality. And this, Ferrara declares, seems to be St. Thomas's meaning. Ferrara bases his interpretation on the

[106] "Circa illam propositionem, *Operatio est motus qui non est actus existentis in potentia, sed actus perfecti,* attendendum quod duplicem habere sensum potest. Pro primo, advertendum quod, cum dicimus *operantem moveri,* et *corpus moveri,* sicut *motus* aequivoce in ipsis sumitur, ita et *moveri:* corpus enim moveri, est ipsum esse subiectum motus; operantem autem, ut sic, moveri, non est ipsum esse subiectum operationis, sed operationem producere. Primus ergo sensus est quod motus proprie dictus non convenit mobili tanquam subiecto, ut sic, inquantum habet formam et perfectionem, sed inquantum est in potentia ad aliquam formam quam non habet, et ad quam per motum tendit: operatio autem convenit operanti tanquam agenti, non inquantum caret forma et est in potentia ad illam, sed inquantum est in actu perfectum per formam; unumquodque enim operatur inquantum est actu per formam, non autem inquantum caret forma.

"Secundus sensus potest est quod motus proprie dictus est actus imperfectus, et relinquit mobile in potentia ad ulteriorem actum; unde talis actus non est complementum mobilis, sed est via ad complementum. Operatio autem est actus perfectus, ad complementum operantis; et non relinquit ipsum operans, ut sic, in potentia ad ulteriorem actum; nec est via ad aliud quod sit complementum operantis. Et hunc sensum videtur ponere Commentator, III De Anima, comment. 28. Videtur enim ponere Sanctus Thomas, Prima, q. XVIII, A. 3, ad 1; et IV Sent. d. XVIII, q. 1, a. 5, qua. 3, ubi sit quod *Motus qui actus imperfecti.*

"Uterque sensus veritatem habere potest. Veruntamen secundus videtur mihi magis philosophicus esse, et magis ad mentem Sancti Thomae et Aristotelis esse." Ferrara, *In II Contra Gentiles,* 82; No. 8, sec. 3.

text from the fourth book of the commentary on the *Sentences* (d. 17, 1. 5. sol. 3): "Motus qui est actus imperfecti et existentis in potentia semper expectat aliquid in futurum ad suae speciei perfectionem: motus autem qui est actus perfecti, non expectat aliquid futurum ad complementum suae speciei." Ferrara asserts that either of these explanations can be accepted. But he believes that the second is more philosophic and Thomistic. It is true that in the text on which he bases his interpretation, stress is laid on the fact that motion is an imperfect act and operation a perfect one. St. Thomas emphasizes this in order to demonstrate why *actus perfecti* is not necessarily in time. But an analysis of the other textual comments on *actus perfecti* shows that more is implied by the term than *actus perfectus*. Ferrara's second interpretation tends to overlook this. Therefore, the first solution proposed by Ferrara seems to be closer to the true meaning of *actus perfecti*. However it requires further development than that which Ferrara has given it here.

### THE MEANING OF *ACTUS PERFECTI*

*Actus perfecti* differs essentially from transient action, which is the perfection of the patient. *Actus perfecti* is, in some way, the perfection of the agent, but not in the sense that it is a form or act that is educed from the potency of the subject. Not every immanent action is an *actus perfecti*. Certain immanent actions, such as nutrition, clearly imply the action of one part on another and are thus accomplished by motion. But even this kind of immanent action differs from true transient action in that the former action remains in the same being that acts, though it involves action of one part as agent on another part as patient. It is a higher form of immanent action that is *actus perfecti*. In this instance the being in act acts, and its action remains in the agent as such. It follows the union of object and recipient—as is the case with the intelligible species informing the intellect; and it is truly the act of a being in act. There is no corresponding *passio*, for there is no effect produced, at least, no term extrinsic to the agent. It will not suffice to say that *actus perfecti* terminates in the being which produces it, for so do all immanent actions.

Thus we are now ready to apply the principles given at length above. If it be asked why a being already in act produces an action, an operation, that is *actus perfecti*, it can only be replied that such is the nature of being. Operation in this sense is an end in itself. Therefore it cannot be asked what it is *for*. God is *Ipsum Esse* and *Ipsum Agere;* the creature participates in *esse*, and, through the medium of accidental potencies, participates in *agere*. It is only the inferior type of action that is for an end outside of itself.

Thus operation is called second act; and to this act corresponds

active potency or power. This potency in creatures is necessarily distinct from their essences. Now this active potency may be one of two kinds: its action may be transient, and the "perfection" of the patient either distinct from the agent (and then we have true transient action) or part of the same being that acts (and then we have immanent action that is transient in its mode of acting); secondly, the action may be that of an operative potency, the action of which is not only immanent but is an *actus perfecti.* In this latter case the act is intrinsic to the agent as agent. This kind of action, then, is the perfection of the agent, not in the order of form, but in the order of final cause. That is, the operative potency is *for* operation. Now the operative potency may be in complete act; if it is, it acts. But it may be only in imperfect act: that is, it is *act* as an accidental modification of the substance, but it is potency in so far as it is ordained to further act for its own intrinsic completion. Thus in order that it be in complete act it requires something further, some extrinsic help, the nature of this aid depending on the nature of the power; for instance, the human intellect depends on the presentation of phantasms. When the power is put in act (and this is an intrinsic perfecting of it) it acts. But *to act* is to exercise some action; the action, in this instance, is *actus perfecti.*

Let us take an example: *intelligere.* Man is a composite of essence and *esse;* hence he requires a power of the accidental order in order to act. Thus he has an intellect in order that he may know. This intellect is an active potency. When the phantasms are presented, the *virtus* that is the agent intellect educes the intelligible species from the potency of the possible intellect. Thus the intellect is put in act; the intellect in act is the intelligible in act. From this intellect in act comes the action which is *intelligere.* In this action the *verbum* or word is produced, in which the exterior thing is known. This production is necessary because direct union with the thing known is not possible for man except in the Beatific Vision.

In this sense, action is the proper act of the power, the power that is in act.[107]

### SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

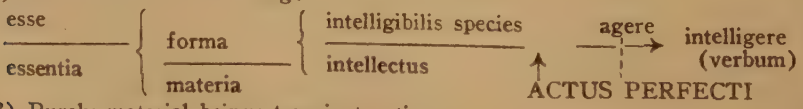
Certain objections may be raised. We have shown how the state-

[107] It might be presented thus in a diagram:

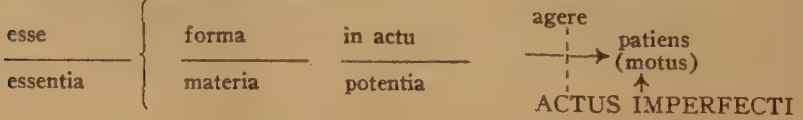
(1) God:

Essentia=Esse=Potentia (activa)=Agere

(2) Man: his act of knowing:




(3) Purely material being: transient action:



ment that action is the proper actuality of the power may be interpreted: as the proper actuality in the order of second act, operation, not in the order of form. Otherwise, if action be the proper actuality of an active power in the sense of intrinsically perfecting it, then the action would of necessity be in the agent that it would perfect. But such is not the case in the active power whose action is transient; for the action in this instance is in the patient. Otherwise, if the action, essentially understood, were in the agent, the agent would have to be changed by its action, since transient action is motion.

What of *sentire?* It is classed as an *actus perfecti,* and yet it is the operation of the conjunct of matter and form. But it was asserted that an agent was capable of *actus perfecti* in proportion to the degree of immateriality of the agent. The answer is, perhaps, that *sentire* in so far as it is a form of knowing, must in some way participate in the order of immateriality, as immateriality is the principle of cognition.[108] But *to sense* is the least perfect *actus perfecti,* since it necessarily implies a corresponding *passio.* Hence it cannot be predicated of God, for the sensitive power must be put in act by something extrinsic, namely, the sensible in act, which is of the material order. Thus, though *to understand* and *to will* and *to sense* are all immanent actions in that they in no sense pass into an exterior thing, only the first two actions can be attributed to God. For, although *sentire* does not imply action passing into something extrinsic, it is, nevertheless, the result of something extrinsic:

> Duplex est actio: quaedam quae consistit in ipso agente. . . . Actio autem Dei non potest intelligi ad modum huiusmodi secundum actionis [i.e. transient], eo quod, cum actio sua sit eius essentia, non egreditur extra ipsum; unde oportet quod intelligatur ad modum primae actionis quae non est nisi in intelligente et volente, vel etiam sentiente; quod etiam in Deum non cadit: quia actio sensus licet non tendat in aliquid extrinsecum est tamen ab actione extrinseca.[109]

However, the problem is not wholly solved. What of this production of the *verbum?* In regard to the soul's production of its powers, does St. Thomas's explanation that it is an "emanatio . . . per aliquam resultationem"[110] have any connection with *actus perfecti?* For an answer a more thorough study of this *actus* is necessary.[111]

### COROLLARY: DIVINE ACTION

God's action is formally immanent and only virtually transient. An

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[108] St. Thomas says, "Patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicuius rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva; et secundum modum cognitionis . . . Sensus autem cognoscitivus est, quia receptivus est specierum sine materia." *ST,* I, 14. 1.

[109] *De Pot.,* 3. 15.

[110] *ST,* I, 77. 6 ad 3.

[111] Cf. *In I Sent.,* d. 3, 4. 8 and *De Pot.,* 10. 1 on this question of the production of the soul's powers. A further question in regard to *actus perfecti* might be an evaluation of it as a part of Thomistic metaphysics. It seems to be important; yet why has it been so little treated both by St. Thomas and his interpreters?

examination of the meaning of this statement will help clarify the meaning of action. At times St. Thomas says that both immanent and transient action can be predicated of God. God's acts of knowing and loving himself are immanent; inasmuch as he creates and conserves things, his action may be said to be transient.[112] Yet St. Thomas frequently affirms that God's action is one with his substance.[113] As the divine action is one with the divine substance, predicamental action cannot be attributed to God. Hence his action is formally immanent at all times, for his action cannot be understood as that which flows into another.[114]

As God cannot be said really to exercise transient action, neither can he be said to be really related to the thing that he produces.[115] Hence his action cannot be said to be received into a patient.[116] God does not act through the medium of transient action. His action is his substance; and whatever is in him is altogether beyond the genus of created things. Nor does some good accrue to the Creator from his production of the creature. He creates without any change in himself. In him there is no real relation to the creature, though the creature be really related to him as effect to cause. An agent is related to the

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[112] "Est autem duplex rei operatio . . . una quidem quae in ipso operante manet . . .; alia vero, quae in exteriorem rem transit . . . Utraque autem dictarum operationum competit Deo: Prima quidem, in eo quod intelligit, vult, gaudet et amat; alia vero in eo quod res in esse producit et eas conservat et regit." *CG,* II, 1. And again, "Genus quidem operationis in aliud extrinsecum transeuntis Deo attribuimus, inquantum dicimus quod creat, conservat, et gubernat omnia. Ex quo quidem operationis genere nulla perfectio Deo advenire significatur sed magis quod proveniat in creatura perfectio ex perfectione divina. Aliud vero operationis genus Deo attribuimus, inquantum ipsum intelligentem et volentem dicimus, in quo ipsius perfectio significatur." *De Pot.,* 10. 1.

[113] "Deus autem non agit actione aliqua, quam necesse sit in aliquo patiente recipi; quia sua actio est sua substantia." *CG,* II, 16. And, "Potentia quae in Deo ponitur nec proprie activa nec passiva est, cum in ipso non sit nec praedicamentum actionis nec passionis, sed sua actio est sua substantia; sed ibi est potentia per modum potentiae activae significata." *De Pot.,* 2. 1 ad 1.

[114] "Divina autem actio non potest esse de genere illarum actionum quae non sunt in agente, cum sua actio sit sua substantia . . . Oportet igitur quod sit de genere illarum actionum quae sunt in agente et sunt quasi perfectio ipsius. Huiusmodi autem non sunt nisi actiones cognoscentis et appetentis. Deus igitur cognoscendo et volendo agit et operatur." *CG,* II, 23.

"Duplex est actio: quaedam quae consistit in ipso agente . . .; quaedam vero quae egreditur ab agente in patiens extrinsecum . . . Actio autem Dei non potest intelligi ad modum huiusmodi secundae actionis, eo quod, cum actio sua sit eius essentia, non egreditur extra ipsum; unde oportet quod intelligatur ad modum primae actionis. . ." *De Pot.,* 3. 15.

"Deus autem non agit per actionem mediam. Quae intelligatur a Deo procedens, et in creaturam terminata: sed sua actio est sua substantia." *De Pot.,* 7. 10.

". . . actio agentis, qua facit sibi simile, est aliquid egrediens ab agente in patiens; quod in Deo locum non habet, quia eius actio est eius substantia." *In Lib. de Div. Nom.,* IX, 2.

[115] Cf. *De Pot.,* 7. 10. Hence there is only a logical relation of God to His creature.

[116] Cf. *De Pot.,* 2. 1 ad 1.

patient in so far as they both are in the same genus, at least in regard to their formalities as agent and patient; the motion is a certain medium between them; thus the action is the good of the agent, at least in so far as the agent is ordered to its production.[117] Now this can not be said of God's action. Further, in order that a thing be created no new action is required on God's part; a new effect indicates a change in the agent only inasmuch as it means new action. But there is not any new action in the agent unless the agent requires transition from potency to act in order to act. This cannot be said of God.[118]

Ferrara posits the problem that if it be said that though production of a thing in being is not transient action on God's part—since creation is not from pre-existing matter—yet the moving of a body locally means only that this motion is from the mover. Then why could not such transient action be attributed to God? Further since the meaning of transient action is only that something going forth from the agent is received in the patient, why not concede God to have transient action, since he can produce something? Ferrara replies that to the

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[117] ". . . movens et agens naturale movet et agit actione vel motu medio, qui est inter movens et motum, agens et passum. Unde oportet quod saltem in hoc conveniant agens et patiens, movens et motum. Et sic agens inquantum est agens, non est extraneum a genere patientis inquantum est patiens. Unde utriusque est realis ordo unius ad alterum, et praecipue cum ipsa actio media est quaedam perfectio propria agentis; et per consequens id ad quod terminatur actio, est bonum eius. Hoc autem in Deo non contingit." *De Pot.*, 7. 10 ad 1.

[118] Cf. *CG*, II, 35. Hence God's action is always formally *immanent;* if it be said to be transient, this is only due to our way of conceiving it, and hence is only a logical signification. This is true in the various ways that action is predicated of God:

(1) When God knows and loves himself, his action is immanent. Cf. *ST*, I, 14, 19 and 20.

(2) Thus the procession in the Blessed Trinity is wholly immanent: "Sed cum omnis processio sit quae tendit in exteriorem materiam, est aliqua processio ad extra; ita secundum actionem quae manet in ipso agente, attenditur processio quaedam ad intra. Non ergo accipienda est processio secundum quod est in corporalibus vel per motum localem, vel per actionem, alicuius causae in exteriorem effectum, ut calor a calefaciente in calefactum; sed secundum emanationem intelligibilem, utpote verbi intelligibilis a dicente, quod manet in ipso. Et sic fides catholica processionem ponit in divinis." *ST*, I, 27. 1. And: "Considerandum est quod in divinis non est processio nisi secundum actionem quae non tendit in aliquid extrinsecum, sed manet in ipso agente. Huiusmodi autem actio in intellectuali natura est actio intellectus et actio voluntatis." *ST*, I, 27. 3.

(3) Creation, considered actively, can not be transient action, for, as we have seen, one of the essential notes of transient action is that it be received into a subject; but creation is the production of the whole being, and not from any pre-existing subject. Thus creation does not posit transient action on the part of God. St. Thomas remarks that, "Creatio active significata significat actionem divinam, quae est eius essentia cum relatione ad creaturam. Sed relatio in Deo ad creaturam non est realis, sed secundum rationem tantum." *ST*, I, 45. 3 ad 1.

(4) Hence when God moves a body that is existing (cf. *ST*, I, 105. 2), or when he moves the human will or produces grace in the human soul, these actions are transient as viewed from the side of the patient, but they imply only immanent action in God. The reason for this will become more evident when we consider just what transient action implies in the agent.

first it may be answered that in created agents and movers, as the action is distinguished from the power, it is no wonder that motion is the action of such agents;[119] but in God there is no distinction of action and power, and hence the motion of bodies moved by him cannot be his *actio,* but is the term and effect of his act of willing. As to the second: action in some way means the completion and perfection of the agent, at least through a mode of final cause; but not even this can be said of God.[120]

God's action may be signified as transient, but this is only according to our way of understanding it. God's action is not really transient, but only virtually so. This action, which is transient only in effect, remains in the agent. So the divine action is transient *productive* but not *subiective.*[121]

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[119] I believe the reason for this will be made clearer when we consider where action as an accident must inhere. As God's action is one with his substance, it can in no way be transient. As a creature's action is of the accidental order, it can be in the patient as motion *from* the agent, and it can also be in the agent in some way.

[120] "Actio autem divina, ut diximus, non est vere transiens, sed tantum secundum similitudinem et modum significandi.

"Si autem instetur iterum, quod licet actio divina qua Deus rem simplici operatione in esse producit, non sit vere transiens, tamen actio qua aliquod corpus localiter movet aut alterat, est vere transiens, quia in aliis moventibus et alterantibus nihil aliud est actio eorum transiens quam ipse motus est a movente: et sic vere attribuitur Deo actio transiens.—Item, cum actio transiens ex sua ratione dicat aliquid egrediens ab agente et receptum in passum, quare non conceditur Deum habere actionem a se transeuntem, sicut et habere aliud a se productum?—

"Ad primum respondetur quod in agentibus et moventibus creaturis, quia non sint purus actus, necesse est quod sua actio a virtute distinguatur tanquam actualitas ab eo cuius est actualitas. Ideo nil mirum si motus est talium agentium actio. In Deo autem non est possibile ponere quod actio sua a sua virtute distinguatur: alioquin per aliquid a se distinctum constitueretur in actu, et sic in ipso aliquid potentialitatis esset. Et ideo motus corporis ab eo moti non potest esse eius actio, sed est effectus et terminus suae actionis, quae est suum velle.

"Ad aliud dicitur quod actio nominat complementum potentiae et est agentis perfectio, saltem per modum finis quo, ut superius dictum est. Effectus autem non est potentiae complementum neque agentis perfectio, sed magis pef agens suum esse et suam perfectionem acquirit: licet posset dici finis agentis ex parte actionis transeuntis se tenens. Nihil autem extrinsecum a Deo potest esse complementum potentiae divinae aut Dei perfectio: sed bene a Deo potest habere complementum sui esse et suae perfectionis." Ferrara, *In II Contra Gentiles,* 16; No. 6, sec. 4.

[121] ". . . intelligendum est quod de actione transeunte dupliciter possumus loqui: aut, inquam, secundum rem et secundum eius propriam rationem: aut secundum modum significandi et secundum quandam similitudinem. Si secundum propriam eius rationem consideretur, sic actio essentialiter est motus, et connotat respectum in agente: motus enim *ut ab hoc* est actio, ut dicitur III Phys.—Si autem consideretur secundum quandam similitudinem et modum significandi tantum, sic non est essentialiter motus, sed dicit aliquid in agente remanens, quod significatur ut in aliud transiens, inquantum per ipsum aliquid in agente distinctum producitur in esse. Sic enim, si velle nostrum esset secundum se rerum productivum, ut ipsum velle esset ipsum producere, producere res esse secundum rei veritatem esset actio immanens, quia esset idem omnino quod velle, tamen significaretur per modum in alterum transeuntis.

Finally, the divine action in its infinite perfection implies the procession of the Blessed Trinity.[122]

To be continued.

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"Actio ergo divina qua res in esse producuntur, cum non sit aliud quam ipsum velle divinum est ipsa Dei substantia, quae a genere motus est omnino separata, non est actio transiens secundum rei veritatem, sed actio immanens quae est velle et intelligere: secundum enim quod Deus intelligit et vult, ita res in esse procedunt, absque alia media actione et motu. Sed verum est quod habet aliquam similitudinem cum actione transeunte, inquantum per ipsam aliquis effectus in creaturis relinquitur. Et ideo a nobis significatur per modum actionis transeuntis in aliud, cum dicimus, Deus *producit,* aut *creat res.* Unde potest dici actio transiens *productive* quia habet terminum extrinsecum productum: non autem *subiective,* quod est proprie esse actionem transeuntem, qua non recipitur in aliquo extrinseco subiecto, sed remanet in agente. Est itaque mens Sancti Thomae hoc loco quod Deus non agit actione quae vere et secundum propriam rationem sit transiens." *Ibid.,* sec. 3.

[122] "Secundum vero aliud operationis genus dicimus in divinis processionem verbi et amoris; et haec est processio personae Fili a Patre, qui est verbum ipsius, et Spiritus Sancti, qui est amor eius et spiramen vivificum." *De Pot.,* 10. 1.

# BOOK REVIEW

LE THOMISME. By Etienne Gilson. 5ième Edition. Vrin, 1945. Pp. 552.

On page 6 M. Gilson states the differences between this present and the former edition of the *Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. I should, under correction, summarize these differences as being M. Gilson's definite expression of the "existentiality" of St. Thomas's philosophy. The matter will become clearer as we proceed.

To begin with, one must, in order to understand St. Thomas's doctrine, be resigned to a sort of knowledge whose whole effort to grasp the real gains in truth what it may lose in Cartesian clarity. "Happy the teachers whose long familiarity with the work of St. Thomas justifies them in reading it as a complete system of fully elaborated ideas! To begin the study of Thomas Aquinas under such teachers is a good thing. They teach order, and nothing is more Thomistic than that. Let us recall, however, that to have clear notions (*apprendre*) is not quite the same thing as to understand (*comprendre*). The best guides to clear notions are those who lead to the light by paths which are lit; to come to understanding, one must at times allow oneself to be led to the light by paths that are dark. To approach St. Thomas in the latter way is to forego the pleasure of enjoying a ready-to-wear doctrine in favor of measuring its cloth against the dim outlines of the reality it fits. This latter course will perhaps be less rapid, but it offers more likelihood of going farther; and at any rate, in order that the search for truth may come to its term here below, our life itself would have to be something different from a beginning" (p. 7).

The first dimly outlines bits of reality that Thomism must clarify in Thomism itself. Saint, theologian, mystic, St. Thomas considered himself a candidate for the Doctorate of the Church. Therefore did he look upon his own doctrine as discourse about God. "I am aware," he writes, "that quite the foremost duty I owe to God in my life is to speak of Him in all I say and feel" (p. 8). To speak of God, this was the job St. Thomas set himself, and this is the job of a Doctor of the Church. Not that St. Thomas gave himself the degree. The Church did that. But he set himself the task. If we put the two, St. Thomas's intention and its approved execution, together, it is difficult to deny that first and foremost he *is* a Doctor of the Church.

Such being St. Thomas's own viewpoint of Thomism, it is quite possible to regard him as a philosopher in matters philosophical and as a theologian in matters of theology; or, to speak of Thomism itself, it is quite possible to view it as the philosophy of a philosopher and as the theology of a theologian. What is impossible is this: to think that St. Thomas thought of himself and of his work in that way. He thought of himself as a theologian. Of the philosopher in him, of the scientist in him, of the rhetorician in him, the theologian was the manager. At least St. Thomas thought so.

This means that one *can* detach the philosophy of St. Thomas from his theology and present it as a more or less complete inventory of philosophy. Many do and have done that, and none better than John of St. Thomas.

To do that, however, is not to expound St. Thomas's philosophy, though it well may be an exposition of philosophy. St. Thomas's philosophy was not the philosophy of a philosopher, but the philosophy of a saint. Against that title of Saint, St. Thomas cannot do much protesting now. But he would not protest (on the contrary) that his philosophy was that of one whose whole heart and flesh and discourse were meant to bespeak God.

The philosophy of the saint that St. Thomas was can be variously described: as a philosophy that is within a theology; as a philosophy whose exposition follows the order of theology; as human knowledge that is glorified by its theological assumption. Perhaps the best name for it is his own: the philosophy which is "revealable." At this point we must step very carefully. The "revealable" is the name of a concrete reality. Now, concrete realities will not stand mauling. Essences may be pushed around; *quod-quid-erat-esses* are none the worse for being pawed. But concrete things, no. The "revealable" is essentially *a*) that which has been, but might not have been, revealed; and *b*) that which has not been, but might have been, revealed. So much for the essence of the revealable. As for the essence of the "revealed," it is this: that which has been revealed. Let us now look at the existential realities which St. Thomas named by those two words. The "revealed" is the truth which is accessible only by revelation. The "revealable" is that truth or those truths that, *a*) accessible to reason whether they be revealed or not, *b*) must be known in order to be saved, *c*) although in fact they would not have been known unless they had been revealed. True, the notion of the "revealable" and the notion of philosophy do not coincide, nor is it impossible to regard St. Thomas's philosophy apart from its characteristic of revealability. St. Thomas himself did not so regard it. He thought of "these matters, of which various philosophical sciences treat, under one formality; so far forth, namely, as they are divinely revealable . . ." Thus, "Sacred doctrine [is] a sort of imprint of the knowledge that God has, a simple and undivided knowledge of all things" (pp. 9-25; *ST*, I, 1. 3 ad 2).

Bent on viewing St. Thomas's philosophy, for once at least (p. 26), as St. Thomas himself viewed it, M. Gilson finds the philosophy of the revealable straightway at grips with the problem of being. The reason is that it is the very existence of a philosophy like St. Thomas's that the problem of being raises. For if St. Thomas did no more than repeat Aristotle on the subject of being, or if he simply stitched together the pieces which others have contributed to the same topic, it would follow either that there is nothing new in Thomism, or, what is worse, that what is new is not true.

*Being* has two meanings: (1) it means the "that which" in the expression "that which exists"; (2) it means the act of existing of that which exists. *Ens* is the Latin equivalent of the first sense, *esse* of the second. The French equivalents are *être, exister* (p. 44.). (In English, the one word *being* has had to shoulder the task of carrying both meanings, but not with any more notable success than the French *être*. Hence many have proposed to translate *ens* by *being*, and *esse* by *to-be*. That is much better; but it does not seem to be quite English, not yet at least. *The act of existing* seems to translate *esse*.)

*Substance* names the beings (*entia*) given us in sense experience. *Essence* names substance so far forth as substance can be conceived as one and defined; hence, essence is substance inasmuch as substance is definable; or exactly, essence is that which the definition states the substance to be. *Quiddity* names essence as expressed in a definition (pp. 44, 45).

Since *substance* always names an essence or quiddity that exists but is not the act of existing itself (thus, the definition of a man is to be a substance whose essence is defined as a rational animal; and so a man is a substance

because he is that defined essence actually existing, though he is not the act of existing itself), it follows that we must define substance as an essence or quiddity that is *per se* (p. 45). To be *per se* means that what substance is, it is in virtue of a single act of existing (p. 47). God is the only being (*ens*) *per se*, i.e., a being whose essence it is to exist. He is not a substance. A substance is an essence which is *per se*. If one insists that man is an *ens per se*, this can only mean that man is a unit *ens*, distinct from other unit *entia* and containing all the determinations requisite for his existence, be those determinations substantial or accidental. It is totally wrong therefore to think of beings (*entia*) as substances and accidents. Rather, beings (*entia*) are unit existents, all of whose constituents exist in virtue of a single and same act of existing, viz., the act of existing of each substance. Accidents have no act of existing of themselves; they exist only in virtue of the substance's act of existing: *eorum esse est inesse* (p. 46).

Substances are distributable into classes. Each class is the object of a concept that is expressible by a definition. In order that we might think by concepts, the data of sense must be "conceptable." The name of that which makes things "conceptable" is the form of the substance. Every substance therefore implies a form in virtue of which a substance is classed in a species whose definition is the expression of the concept. Yet it is a fact that species as such do not exist: *man* is not a substance; this and that man are substances. There must therefore be a factor in the individual that is different from its form and distinguishes one individual of the same species from another. The name of that factor is matter. Thus, every substance is a unit whose act of existing is at once and undividedly the act of existing of form and matter (p. 47).

To ask why we name the composite of matter and form *beings* (*entia*) is to ask whether it is the matter or the form that makes substances exist. It is neither. *Esse* is the reason why substance is an *ens*. Hence, the concrete substance, the object of sense experience, has two compositions: the composition of matter plus form, which constitutes the substantiality of substance; the composition of substance plus its act of existing, which constitutes the substance as being (*ens*). This last composition makes substance an existent (*ens*). "Indeed, nothing has actuality except insofar as it exists. The act of existing itself is the actuality of all the rest, forms themselves included. Its relation to other things, consequently, is not the relation of that which receives to that which is received; rather, it is the relation of that which is received to that which receives. When, in fact, I say of a man or of a horse or of any other thing: this exists, the act of existing itself is signified as something formal and received and not as that to which the act of existing belongs" (p. 51; *ST*, 1, 4. 1 ad 3).

Provided with this doctrine about being, M. Gilson proceeds to discuss (1) the famous essence-existence distinction against the background of Arabian philosophy (pp. 53-60); (2) the nature of the judgment, which is the operation of the mind by which being (*esse*) is known; (3) the difference between Aristotle's and St. Thomas's metaphysic (pp. 60-68); and (4) the "essentialist" theologies (pp. 69-87). Chapter IV states the issue of all that has preceded concerning being: *haec sublimis veritas:* the essence of God is His act of existing.

Although the proofs of the existence of God (pp. 88-114) are presented as in the former edition, their drift (pp. 114-22) receives new attention. The proof by movement can be taken as typifying this drift. Aristotle had concluded to the existence of a "first desirable," immobile source of all movement. St. Thomas concludes as well to the existence of a first efficient cause.

Not that St. Thomas did not realize that Aristotle's God was the cause of substances. He knew it, but *he* was concerned to show that the efficient cause brought its effects to the act of existing. In this sense all St. Thomas's proofs for the existence of God amount to showing the necessity of an act of existing which, because self-sufficient, is the cause of all other things, which are not self-sufficient. That this is so can be shown by the metaphysical distillation of all the five ways which St. Thomas made in the fourth chapter of the *De Ente et Essentia*: "But everything which belongs to any being is either caused from principles of the being's nature, as risibility in man, or it comes to it through some extrinsic principle, as light in the air from the influence of the sun. But it cannot be that existence itself should be caused by the very form or quiddity of the thing; caused, that is, as by an efficient cause, since if it were so, something would be the cause of itself and something would bring itself into existence; but this is impossible. Therefore everything which is such that its existence is different from its nature must needs have its existence from another. And because everything which exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself, as to its first cause, there must be something which is the cause of the existence in all things, otherwise there would be an infinite series of causes, since everything which is not existence only would have a cause of its existence, as has been said" (C. Riedl, *On Being and Essence*, pp. 45-46; Gilson, pp. 118-19). Aristotle's God is only desired by things; St. Thomas's God is desired by and desires things.

The knowledge of God by negation and analogy (pp. 140-60) is treated anew, and the treatment of analogy will be considered by many to be new in more senses than one. There is analogy among the names of many things that are related to the same thing: thus there is analogy among all things that are called healthful, because they are related to the health of a living being. There is a second case of analogy, the analogy that relates one thing to another as cause and its effect. When medicine is called healthful, it is not so called because it is good health; medicine is called healthful because it is a cause of health. It is in this sense that we name God: God is no more good, just, wise, or powerful than the medicine that heals is healthful; yet what we name justice, wisdom, and so on are surely in God, because he is their cause. To affirm of God the perfection of creatures according to a mode of perfection that escapes us is to keep midway between the purely univocal and the purely equivocal. In the order of concepts there is no middle ground between the univocal and the equivocal. In the order of judgments, since all judgments about God are judgments of existence, there is a midground between the univocal and the equivocal, and it is this: to speak of God in judgments that are not *purely* equivocal. It follows that we have no knowledge of what God is. No concept we form of the effects of God is a concept of God, although we can by an affirmative judgment attribute to God the name that designates the perfection corresponding to a given effect of God's.

Chapter VI (pp. 187-206) is an addition. It is an estimate of St. Thomas's natural theology, mostly by St. Thomas himself. The rest of the book reproduces the former edition with the exception of Chapters II, III, IV, and V of the last part, which outline the moral philosophy of St. Thomas.

For a reviewer to estimate such a work as this would be as futile as an attempt to estimate the doctrine that it purports to expound. However, there are some distinct impressions it leaves. If God be the only fully existential being there is, it is small wonder that an existential doctrine be mostly concerned with him. A brief inspection of the table of contents will confirm the fact that *Le Thomisme* is mostly about God. Then there is the

sharpness of the description of St. Thomas's philosophy, the "revealable." So far as I know, M. Gilson has nowhere else described the philosophy of St. Thomas in such a clear-cut manner. Perhaps the outstanding contribution the book makes is to the field of metaphysics; and within this field, the nature of the judgment and of analogy receives a straight-from-the-shoulder treatment that is hard to match. Lastly, M. Gilson's interpretation of St. Thomas's doctrine on our knowledge of God seems to dominate, by assimilating their antitheses, the two opposed interpretations of Fr. Sertillanges and M. Maritain. According to M. Gilson, St. Thomas, while denying we have any conceptual knowledge of what God is, accords us nevertheless a judicative knowledge of Him. In sum, *Le Thomisme* seems to confirm historically Pius XI's authoritative description of Scholastic philosophy: *Id quod efficit ut [theologia] vim scientiae veri nominis habeat . . . nihil aliud est nisi Philosophia scholastica, duce et magistro Aquinate, in usum ipsius sacrae disciplinae conversa* (*Officiorum Omnium*, August 1, 1922). For if Scholastic philosophy be nothing else but the philosophy that under Aquinas's guidance and teaching was taken over to serve purposes of theology, with the result that theology deserves the name of a real science, it is difficult to deny that the "revealable" is any natural knowledge assumed by sacred doctrine in view of its own end (p. 24). Now the "revealable" is St. Thomas's philosophy.

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# BOOK NOTICES

PSYCHOLOGIA. By Gerard Esser, S.V.D. Mission Press, Techny, 1945. Pp. xvi + 499. $3.00.

This new and revised edition of Father Esser's Latin textbook for psychology contains so many alterations and additions that it is almost an entirely new book. The book is designed for a seminary course in psychology which combines philosophical and experimental psychology in one course and directs both subjects toward the work of the priesthood. Considering the fact that philosophical and experimental psychology are distinct sciences with distinct formal objects and distinct methods of approach, one realizes the difficulty of combining the two successfully in one textbook. The disadvantage of such a method is that often it is difficult to distinguish when Father Esser is approaching the subject from the experimental method and when he is giving a philosophical solution to a problem. However, the seminarian will find in this book all the basic conclusions which he will need in his care of souls and in his apologetic work.

Father Esser does not base his philosophical treatise of man either on Thomistic or Suarezian or Scotistic metaphysics, but is rather inclined to be an eclectic. His purpose seems to be to omit the basic metaphysical differences in order to emphasize the common agreement on major apologetic points in Catholic philosophy. He does not point out that the basic differences in Thomistic, Suarezian, and Scotistic psychology are ultimately reducible to a profound difference in their metaphysical principles. A good example of this point is his treatise on cognition. True, the question of the proper object of the intellect and of the necessity of a *species expressa* is a disputed point; but the basis of the dispute is the metaphysical constitution of the individual and the nature of action.

The Thomistic philosopher will not find this textbook satisfactory since it fails to introduce the student to the study of Aristotle, St. Thomas, and the other great scholastic authors in philosophy. The book is well edited and arranged according to the traditional thesis method. The only objection from the point of view of scholastic method is that Father Esser does not arrange a list of objections with their proper answers at the conclusion of each thesis.

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LAS FRONTERAS DE LA FILOSOFIA Y DE LA FISICA. TOMO I: EL ATOMO. By Jaime Maria del Barrio, S.J. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1945. Pp. viii + 232.

*The Frontiers of Philosophy and Physics* is the first of a series of four volumes dealing with problems in philosophy and physics. The author has summarized his lectures given over a period of years in the Department of Philosophy of Comillas Pontifical University, Spain. The book is a clear and interesting compendium of the progress made in knowledge about the constitution of matter; it begins with the Greek Atomists, led by Leucippus and Democritus, and ends with the most recent developments of wave and

quantum mechanics. The first part borders on nuclear physics, treating of the atom, its properties, functions in electricity, disintegration, artificial synthesis, and so on. The second part treats of the structure of the atom and especially of the different properties and relations of the peripheral electrons and their interpretation according to the theories of Bohr, De Broglie, Schroedinger, Heisenberg, and Dirac.

The book is written presumably for the course in scientific questions connected with philosophy that is prescribed by the Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* for students of Pontifical Institutes. The book presupposes at least a general course in the various physical sciences and has for its object a knowledge of the methods, the great discoveries, and conclusions of the different branches of science in their broader outlines, together with their relations to the principles and doctrines of Scholastic philosophy. Hence, the author omits many complicated mathematical formulas and other technical developments that would be unintelligible to those not specialists in science. He touches on the main topics of atomic physics and describes the experiments which have brought about the discovery of the atomic bomb. There is an excellent reference list in the book and many illustrations to concretize scientific knowledge.

Although the matter presented is adequate from the point of view of physics, especially atomic physics, it is inadequate from the point of view of philosophy. Here and there mention is made of how scientific discoveries have their repercussions in the philosophical field; for instance, the impression is given that the conversion of matter into energy will force the philosopher to change some of his traditional concepts. But how or in what precise manner is not told. In the treatment of questions such as the substantial nature of the proton and the positron, the Heisenberg principle of indeterminism, relativity, and the nature of physical laws, a discussion of the corresponding problems in philosophy would have been very welcome. These questions are of the greatest interest, for it is here that we find the contradictions, real or apparent, between the two fields of knowledge. It is possible that when the series is completed, the author will devote one volume to this aspect of the total problem. The promised volume on the objective validity of our perception of matter may prove our criticism to be premature. Still, we can only say that this book offers much about physics but solves few of the philosophical problems born of modern discoveries.

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